



하 룬 관

H A R O O N

이현비 게임 판타지 장편소설
ROK GAME FANTASY STORY

ROK
MEDIA

EDICION

Haroon

– 하룬 –

- Volume 1 -

**-Author-
LEE Hyun Bi**

[Channy_]

- STORY -

In the distant future, Earth is heavily affected by consecutive nuclear wars and humans are barely surviving under a shield protecting their few “Unions.” Inside the Unions, people are classified from S to F based on their abilities/aptitudes and live in residential zones that match their classification.

Our protagonist Jung Min was born as one of the 300,000 artificially inseminated children created to prepare for the future of mankind. However, it turned out that he was aptitude-less (i.e. incompetent) and was thus pushed out to the F Zone, the most dangerous and outermost part of the Union.

Then everything changes on his first day of Adulthood: Jung-min receives an advanced Virtual Reality capsule from his foster father for a game called ‘Beyond.’

Overall, Harun is an incredible tale of a failure’s growth and success both in the gaming world and the real world.

In South Korea, Harun is considered as one of three best game-fantasy novels (the other two being the Legendary Moonlight Sculptor and Ark).

Prologue

Document class: Disposed (Z-class)

Subject: New Human Project Final Result Report

Project progress overview (Refer to the corresponding section for details.)

Human Calendar Year 101

A secret resolution of The 4th Senate of Whole Global Committee was made, establishing this project with the objective of creating new human species with new abilities. Gene pool was built including genes of; most superb scientists on Earth, Superiors and Experts of different categories, and skilled specialists.

Human Calendar Year 104

Using sperms and eggs of 20,000 people with the good medical state, a total number of 300,000 of artificial insemination proceeded in 32 big Unions.

Refer to the page 7~300 for details.

Human Calendar Year 109: 1st ability test

Experiment Subjects: 283,200 survivors

959 Potentials were found including 22 S-class Subjects.

Refer to the page 301~592 for details.

Human Calendar Year 114: 2nd ability test

Experiment Subjects: 271,004 survivors

Including 204 Potentials that were missed in 1st test, a total number of 1,111 ability users were found.

Notes:

- newly found Potentials were found during the process of childcare of adoptive parents.

- 32 children were certificated by World special ability associations.

Refer to the page 593~812 for details.

Human Calendar Year 119: 3rd ability test

Experiment Subjects: 251,009 Survivors

Including 109 Potentials that were missed in the 1st and 2nd test, a total number of 1,164 ability users were found.

Notes:

- Combat ability Potentials were all put into Earth Safeguard Training Camp.
 - 82 of Esper related ability Potentials were put into the corresponding Research Lab.
 - 5 of Ki related ability Potentials were put into the corresponding Research Lab
- Refer to the page 818~1124 for details.
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Human Calendar Year 124: Final ability test and current progress

Experiment Subjects: 224,625 Subjects

3 new Potentials were found.

Notes:

- Combat Potentials (5 A-class, 9 R-class, rest are C-class)
 - All 301 Academic Potentials were admitted to Universities. 54 of the Subjects went on for their doctorate. 6 of the Subjects are working as researchers.
 - All special ability Potentials were put into corresponding Research Lab and began their training. Among them, 5 Potentials were confirmed as A-class, 23 as R-class.
- Refer to the page 1,125~1562 for details.
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Conclusion

The 20 years long project failed. According to the result, it can be inferred that shuffling superior genes does not affect the born rate of Potentials. Potential adopted parents are under a scrutiny, though there is no evidence found yet to reverse the study so far – that love and care from their parents and the environment have more influence than genetic factors.

Majority of Potentials has appeared from the parents with great character and personality that could fill the place of their biological parents, and in very rare cases, Potentials has appeared with no relation with the environment. In some cases, the Subjects who were originally found as Potentials has lost their ability due to the environmental affection. Further research is required.

Notes:

1. The 5th Senate of WGC's secret organization has captured circumstantial evidence showing there was interference by Ancient Mothercom on some operation procedure. The Final confirmation on the suspect was deferred.

2. VR Game developing company 'Necomwall' has approached to obtain top secrets and research results of artificial humans. Their purpose remained unknown. It is hoped that investigation of this affair is held in the near future, and more research funds were made for in-depth study.

Refer to the page 1563~1614 for details.

Reported by Dr. Mark Wales and 32 others.

Editor's notes:

Channy : WAIT! BEFORE YOU CONTINUE TO CHAPTER 1!

Welcome! And thank you for visiting my blog to check out how amazing Haroon is. Before you jump straight into the main section of the novel, I have something that I would like you to know. It's more like a warning, to be honest.

I started translating Haroon when my English wasn't as fluent as I am now, and it was not so long ago when I realized how horrible first few chapters were edited. I am re-translating these earlier chapters, and if you are new to this novel, I strongly suggest to stay away from my works for now. It only gets better beginning Vol.2 Chap.8 part 2 – It's the part where two gentlemen, Tom and Kmatt, has joined as proofreaders.

I will let you know (somehow) once remaster is done. Again, thank you for reading!

Chapter 1

The day of being an adult

<<The day of being an adult.>>

As always, Southwestern area of the resident on District F-4 was dense with a cloud of dust, blinding the eyesight of the passengers.

“And it is a lot worse today.”

Jungmin headed out to the street covering every inch of his body with toe-touching long coats and worn out bandanna, only revealing his eyes. As it was past the morning rush hour the streets were empty but somehow the grocery owner noticed his patron and shouted.

“Jungmin! Aren’t you being an adult today? Are you on the way to register?”

“Yes, I am!”

“Haha! It would be good if they get you placed in the core area like F-1 or F-2...”

“Oh, I doubt it. There is no way they would favor such an uneducated jobless man like me. It would be a miracle if they give me a job at least.”

But he was hoping for it from the moment he woke up. Jungmin is a citizen that the government has officially considered him as an ‘incompetent’ as he didn’t have any so-called talent. That’s why Jungmin said that it would be a miracle. This miracle did happen to some people, even though no one knows the real reason of it.

‘Only if I could move to a different area...’ he thought.

The building he lives in was so old that it was just one step away from being collapsed. Giant crack in the wall allowed dust to pile up just in a day no matter how often he cleans the house. The house was very near to the border of Barrier too. At least, it prevented radioactive pollution getting spread to inside, but it wasn’t strong enough to prevent Harks and Outers from attacking the town.

Outers are the group of people who live outside of the barrier. They are usually the

great minds who got kicked out for opposing the government of Union., Criminals and the rest were who refused to live inside the Union since the end of WW3. These people were often exposed to the risk of getting robbed or being involved in robbing. However, getting robbed wasn't the greatest threat they had.

'At least, I hope I don't get to see those horrible creatures anymore...' Jungmin thought.

Harks appeared shortly after the WW3. Experts say that they appeared as the biohazard materials and radioactive dust that covered the entire Earth caused genetic mutation. Harks' leather was so thick that gunpowder weapons such as guns and cannons, not even Energy Beam guns could not penetrate it. Just by imagining their giant sharp teeth, people shudder with fear so much they couldn't help knock their knees together. As Jungmin worked at the crematorium, he got used to seeing horrible conditioned corpses. He was fearless to most of the things. Harks

As Jungmin worked at the crematorium, he even got used to seeing horrible and disgusting corpses. He was fearless to most of the things. Harks are one kind of the things he still feared. They occasionally attacked humans. They were agile and sneaky enough to get into the Barriers avoiding defense troops of Unions who had tools and weapons that can be a threat to them. Despite Union's effort, Harks always found a weak point to sneak into.

Not only harks were life threatening to the humans. Mutated creatures called orcs were weaker than the harks. They are wild, strong, and they always moved in a flock. It is known that they were born 10 at a time, just as pigs. No other species could match their reproduction rate. It has not been 100 years since Orgs has appeared to the earth, but they already have created their own great society, and has been advancing quick enough to worry experts. Experts predicted that they will be a greater problem to humans than Harks later on. Apart from those two species, it is quite common to see a lot more mutated beasts which had great intelligence and strength outside of the barrier. Some said these creatures were created in the experiments of gene lab of 21st century of AD calendar when there were no ethics and morals, but nobody knew what the truth is.

They say the radioactivity materials got much weaker as it has been 200 years after the horrible war, but humans could not expose their bare body to the air yet, so humans were still living in the barrier. Using Super Artificial Intelligence mounted computers, – well known as Ancient computers – hundreds of these barriers were constructed all over the globe in Year 1 of Human Calendar (H.C.). If these barriers

weren't built, the human would have extinct and the Earth would have been probably ruled by harks, orcs and other mutated species.

Unions were built in the barriers, and they are the substitution of nation system human previously had. It is more like city-states. They divided the barriers into sections by the distance from the central area. The most central part of barriers was named District S, and as further it gets from the center, it was named District A, B, C, D, E and F as the outermost area.

With only a few million population per Union, Unions had an extremely sluggish society. Society in Union naturally became a class society. It was because of the property of energy barrier that it gets weaker further it gets from the central section. A threat from mutated creatures was getting heavier every day, and the ones who can enter and exit the barrier was limited to Military, high-rank officers and businessmen. The monopoly of wealth and power in District S is hardly new.

The people living in District S called themselves S-Class, and they wield absolute power in Union. People classified as 'Capable'- Union's high-class officers, including scientists, experts, and professional groups – and great businessmen live in District A. District C and D is where middle-class people live, like researchers, technicians, engineers, and soldiers. District E and F was the largest area that covers over half of union, but 70% to 80% of Union population lived in which made population density very high and lowered quality of life.

District F is especially where the lowest class of Union lives in. As mentioned earlier, serious criminals were kicked out of the barrier, but minor criminals were sent to district F, making them live with 'incompetents' and poor families. Living with criminal state and being poor was inherited to several generations. District F was the place where people have a miserable life of barely surviving day by day.

In District F-4, the outermost area of Union, residents wished to move at least to F-3 or F-2. Everyone knew that getting closer to central district makes their life quality much better, whereas their ability could not get them out of District F, forever.

Unlike the early age of Union, the number of interaction and communications between the Unions got reduced because of the danger of mutated species. As about 200 years passed with such environment and circumstances, the society got sluggish and opportunity of getting to a better social status never really happened now.

People hoped to move to the safer area, often phrased as core district. Well, at least the core district of their district. It requires getting into a company that could provide them a good house with a high salary, or they will have to earn a lot of money to move their house. There was a tiny chance of doing that because of a number of jobs a Union had. Jungmin knew he was born by artificial insemination. The Union he was living in gave up sending Jungmin for adoption because of his records. He dropped himself out of school and ran away from adoptive family, both for several times. So instead of trying to adopt him, Union gave him a place to live and public job until he reaches the legal age. He started working as street cleaning or working on the farms owned by Union,

Jungmin knew he was born by artificial insemination. The Union he was living in gave up providing Jungmin for adoption chance because of his records. He dropped himself out of school and ran away from adoptive family several times. So instead of trying to offer adoption, Union gave him a place to live and public job until he reaches the legal age. He started working as street cleaning or working on the farms owned by Union,

In Jungmin's case, who has no support from the family nor any particular ability or skills, there is no doubt he will live such a miserable life of concerning tomorrow for life, and he will slowly fade away, quietly, without being remembered by anyone.

‘Still...!’

Jungmin closed his hand tightly, just as he was hoping for his wish to be granted.

Jungmin had to hide to corners several times, away from an occasionally blowing whirlwind that sucked up the whirling the dust high up in the air, then he could make his way to the office. The office was located where the residents slangily call the place ‘Bee house’ in a self-mocking mood because it is full of high buildings filled with small, old poor rooms just like bee hives. Between the Bee houses, the only one low-rise building of District F was revealed as dust got little less dense. Ironically, because the high buildings were so crowded, the office building seemed to be more expensive and comfortable. In fact, they were.

‘How I wish If they would offer me a job in that office!’

Jungmin sighed taking a short glance at the 12-floor office. The inside of office was so neat and comfortable, unlike his house. He needed to sneak in and stole glances at people as he was so sorry for messing up the clean floor with his dirty shoes.

Fortunately, the Resident service – the most visited service by people – was located nearest to the entrance. The Social Welfare Service was where Jungmin visited every time when he got to the office. Under legal age, without any job nor sponsor, Jungmin was living on welfare and public jobs. But the Social Welfare Service was located at the innermost place, and to be there, he had to endure the officer's strange glance at him in frowzy clothing, ending up feeling timid. It was fortunate to have fewer people around, maybe it was because of the time. Jungmin hid his lean and bony body under his rug reminding coat, pulling his collar up.

“Greetings, sir! How can I help you?”

The Receptionist asked with her sweet tone. Her beauty was indeed awesome, as it was something well known as the envy of people in District F. Jungmin felt even more small to face her, he was nobody like her.

But the Receptionist's eyes rested on the screen, after giving short, dull glance at him. For her, it was just another common look of losers in this town. However, her careless attitude was a big relief for Jungmin.

“Well, I've reached a legal age today...”

“Oh, then you'll have to go ask third-floor front desk for that.”

She gave another look at Jungmin, this time with interest. It was unusual to see someone reaching their legal age in the middle of a month in this district. It is way more common in District A or B.

It was long ago, right after when the war was finished and aftermath almost dragged the humanity to extinction. There was a small change made to Solar system despite how it kept its order for a few billion years. It was an asteroid. It settled in the gravitational force of the earth, and became another moon. Strangely, the birth of new life was concentrated to the period of a new moon and dark moon.

‘Hmm, Could this man be artificial one as well?’

It is banned by law now but there was a year where the global scale of artificial insemination of human was made to cover low pregnancy rate. This year was the year when these artificial humans reach their legal age, of course, she didn't know that much though. While going under staff training, she heard these artificial humans

sometimes visit the office to be certified in other districts, but it was her first time actually seeing them. She also heard the rumor that they are usually talented.

‘Could he be a Dropout then?’

Not only artificial humans but people considered useless were sent to this district as well, mostly from the core strict. After taking another look at shabby clothes and dusty face, her face had become peculiarly expressionless. She was busy enough not to bother with such losers.

At third-floor, Jungmin met a middle-aged officer with silver wing medal. Proudly displaying the evidence of hours he served for barrier defense troop, he took a high-handed pose and looked at Jungmin. As he found no respect from Jungmin, his face got impassive and he searched Jungmin’s profile. His eyes were fixed at one point of the screen, but soon he didn’t bother to.

Name: Jungmin

Date of Birth: 15th July, H.C. 104

Background:

New Human Project Subject, long-period probationer.

Test results:

First test – Incompetent

Second Test – Incompetent

Third test – Incompetent

Dropped out of school at age of 17, at Grade 1 of Highschool.

At age of 17 years 4 month, he ran away from the adoptive family.

Residence: District F-SW4 124-27-024

Management: Qualified for child welfare

Notes: Status of probationer gets cleared when they reach the legal age.

“We’ve confirmed that you have reached your legal age. Please wait for a moment.”

The tone of the officer had no expression just as the receptionist in the first floor.

District F was where uncivilized borderers live, and it is a place where losers gather around. It seems that Jungmin's record wasn't peculiar enough to draw his attention.

Watching potbellied officer's back of heading staff-only area to get something, Jungmin couldn't erase the bitter smile from his face. He imagined a man boasting about fighting Harks on his days on defense troop. Jungmin met a similar person in his middle school. They are innocent, normal people who formed a basis of the Union.

'I hope I had a parent like him at least... '

He found out how cruel the world is only after living all by him. He never knew the world isn't kind enough to treat one well if one is incompetent. He never knew how small he was to live all by him before he ran away from his family. He regretted protesting to his families by dropping out of the school and running away from them for being incompetent and their careless attitude on Jungmin. If he admitted himself back then, he might not have to concern about the job. At least he was raised and grown in District B, and he could have lived District B people's life.

It was not so long before he woke up from regretting mood by the footsteps. He lifted his head and saw the officer. He noticed that there was a slight change to the officer's look on Jungmin. Jungmin was good at catching the change of small details, but that was just not enough to meet Union's standard.

"Hmm. There is a gift for you celebrating your coming-of-age. No one knows what this box is for, there is no name of the sender too. Have you... Have you found your biological parents? Well, that was stupid that I asked it."

He asked with a puzzled expression.

Most people heard about the project that revealed Union's greatest political scandal. New Human Project Subject meant that Jungmin was born by artificial insemination. Creation of barrier and development of machines reduced the danger from pollution and mutated species, significantly increasing the average life span. This lead avoiding pregnancy, and it led to decreasing population over time. W.G.C. had no choice but to make artificial insemination.

But the project was canceled after a year. It was due to massive exposure of corrupt businessmen deeply related or participated in the project. As artificial humans were born as orphans without any agreement of their parents, there were heavy blames

and criticism of moral issue and ethics. But there was a more important problem. W.G.C. has destroyed their data of semen and eggs during the early stage of the project. Therefore, not only artificially born humans like Jungmin knew who their parent is, but the biological parents don't know that they are a parent to someone.

Additionally, it was the Progressive Party's suggest that birth of hundred thousands of babies can lead financial problem, adopting them and educating them. The progressive party attempted to attack the conservative party by criticizing the high-funding inhuman project, exposing corruptions, and they succeed.

As 300,000 babies were born anyways, budget and human resource were spent inevitably, but it was soon proved right that new politicians had to stopped the project. The result of the project was a failure. Just as anthropologists predicted, lack of love and care from parents lead artificial humans to be incompetent and made them be the lower class of the society.

Jungmin was puzzled. What do you mean by biological parents? There are rare cases where people found out they provided their sperm and eggs allowing them to find their child, but you cannot count on that. Most of them don't even know they have a child.

"I doubt it." the officer claimed.

There were only powders that seemed to be some kind of foods in the box. The officer thought maybe someone felt pity about pale bony Jungmin and thought they might give some food for him. The officer lost his interest in Jungmin after seeing Jungmin's blank stare him.

"Your resident for next few years was assigned to the same house you live in now. While it is true that there was no criminal record and you settled down well, but Union judged that no supports will be needed. Not any longer since you were classed as incompetent. Fortunately, W.G.C. has gifted you \$5000 for being a legal age as artificial human. Use it well and live well."

Jungmin nodded with silence. He felt better at least he got small fortune at least, and that made him thankful to Officer's words.

"Also, we will deliver the box that you got to your house as it is quite heavy. \$5000 will be transacted to your personal bank account on your visit to the Audit office. Oh, right.

The audit office is on the second floor.”

“Thank you very much!”

“But first you will have to get an injection of adult resident bio-chip at Health Care Center so follow me.”

Yes, Jungmin was hoping for a small change in his life, he was stunned when he actually got those – A weird gift and \$5000.

‘Who on earth would send this to me?’

But there was no time for that. Potbelly was already heading to the Health Care Center. Jungmin followed him hurriedly, with his mind was up in the air.

Chapter 2

Gifted

Even though there was no one to celebrate him being an adult, Jungmin couldn't be in the better mood on the way back to his house.

Jungmin never had this much money in his hands. He used to earn a little more than \$500 per month by welfare from the Union and his job. His monthly expense on housing, lowest quality foods, and various taxes was a little bit over \$400. That still left him \$100 extra to spare but it soon ran out buying some proper stuff like a cloth or a small electronic gadget. He did try to save up some money, but \$520 was all the savings he had.

Jungmin came back to his house through the dusty winds that were getting stronger as it reaches noon. He was happy for the big money he got, but there was no one around he could share his feeling with.

The neighbors of the place he lived for a couple of years were always busy surviving another day or they lost their reason for life so they only lived because they couldn't die. There was no place in their mind for the others, and no one expected for some. Jungmin liked how people don't give any attention to him when he settled at this place with help from Union Welfare service, but soon he missed the warm hearts and people, and that mind grew as the time goes by. He even thought of going back to his adoptive parents laying his pride aside.

"Well, I got used to it anyway." Said Jungmin.

Jungmin is too shy to approach the others and he didn't even dare to do it, so he partially gave up other's attention and love. He only could live on doing that way. It might be better to be eaten by Harks than getting depression AND having the bad living environment. Living with that mindset slowly made him have neither dream nor hope, and he became heartless and lethargic.

Even though it was noon, inside of the building was so dark. It has been so long since the last day when they painted the wall. The building itself was so old that you could

see the wall frames in places. It is still a place to den out of the wind so what a relief.

Criminals and those homeless who sold their own house lived on the streets. There were uncountable cases of how these people went missing unnoticed, usually eaten by Harks or being involved in crimes. So he was thankful to have a house, even if it may be an awful one.

On the 18th floor of this old poor building, there was a total of 10 houses including Jungmin's one. Those four small, singled room houses and six of them were occupied by families unlike how Jungmin lived alone. He didn't like them as all they did were to him was making noises all they long.

If it was Jungmin, he wouldn't dare to have a child as it will only inherit him father's social status, but he thought those people who formed a family will be happier than those lone wolves. There was a sudden feeling of something that he thought he forgot over time. It was loneliness.

'Would Jinsoo be at home right now? No, not at this time.'

Jungmin answered to his own question.

Jinsoo lived in the next door. He is one of the neighbors that Jungmin actually communicates with. Jinsoo became a borderer because of the similar reason to Jungmin. They often had dinner together at a street restaurant. Jinsoo is 26, and nowadays, he works at Union farms.

'How am I supposed to live, alone?' Thought Jungmin.

Being incompetent and running away from home classified Jungmin as a Dropout, and made Jungmin settle down in District F. After the settlement, Jungmin did any public job that he could take; from the part-time job at the crematorium to cleaning the street filled with dust and sands. His health wasn't good enough to even attempt to do higher salary jobs such as construction site worker, building cleaner or restaurant waiter. Jungmin had no idea how to live on as he became an adult. Jungmin lost his job as a public worker that didn't require much physical ability. It was because he became an adult today.

Jungmin took off the piece of cloth that he used as a turban and whipped it on his coat. Sands mixed with dust dropped to the doorway. He used to clean the house, but he

learned how to give things up. He headed to the bathroom to take a shower. As the dust and sands contain radioactive materials that were released by thousands of nuclear weapons launched centuries ago, one had to wash them off when you get indoor. Jungmin took off his pants, shirts, and underwear that were provided periodically by Union as child welfare. Bony, rather skeleton like the body, was reflected in the mirror.

“What should I do to live on now?” Jungmin feebly said.

He imagined what if he was born in District F in the first place. Maybe at least he could have learned how to survive in this place from the school and his neighbors. Schools here do vocational educations at least. If he didn’t adrift in his young ages, he could have gotten the education about preparing the future even he was classified as incompetent. But he missed that chance as well.

He was really hoping for someone who could give advice on his future or his life, but there was no one around who could help him. He blamed his bashfulness but all he could do was shaking off his frustration by letting out a sigh.

Like his usual break, Jungmin was killing time, watching through the small dirty window how dusty winds dyes the sky yellow. His only hobby was playing video games, but even that didn’t draw his attention for some reason. Maybe it was because of the gift, or maybe it was because he was facing uncertain future.

The gift was delivered after few hours past lunch time. Jungmin fall in thoughts looking reflective box as if it was bewitching him. By the looks of the box, He only could think of the coffins that S-class nobles use. He wondered who would ever want to gift him. As always, imagination didn’t answer the question.

“Well, It is not gonna be a coffin of mine. It isn’t like I made some enemy nor my social class is that great to be buried under the actual dirt so there is no way one will send me a coffin...” Said Junmin, knowing none of them actually make any sense.

Jungmin began touching the box. Jungmin couldn’t figure out which material this 1.5 meters wide, 3 meters long box is made out of. It was metallic but it wasn’t something he has seen nor heard. It was certain that it wasn’t made out of metals like aluminum or steel. It did take some time carefully searching the box until Jungmin’s eyes found something. There was a button on the side of the box that is unnoticeable unless you look for it really carefully.

The box opened making small motor noises. Jungmin couldn't take his eyes off the inside of the box. tons of sacks and bags filled his eyesight They came with different sizes, and they were so many that those were uncountable.

"What on earth are these? I guess I will find it out soon," said Jungmin with excitement.

Jungmin dragged the sacks out one by one. He lost the count after counting a hundred of them. What really triggered his curiosity was not the number of bags, but it was what sacks contained, and what sacks were made out of. He didn't know what sacks were made out of, but it was the labels really caught his eyes.

"Wheat flour, Rice flour, Arrowroot, Licorice, Red Sea Cucumber, Abalone, Miyook, Ginseng, Spicebush, Knotweed, Eplimediums, Honey... What on earth are these?"

Those were endless, Some sound familiar but most of them are things he never heard before. Even those that Jungmin finds it familiar only could be seen in the history books. Unlike the days before Human Calendar, there were not many types of crops that hundred stories high Union farms can mass produce. Sack of crops was heavy and big, the rest of them were small. Some had labels of various fruits. Some were labeled with the names of rare herbs, sea creatures, seaweeds, there were even minerals. You could not obtain these anymore because of the barrier.

"I simply can't understand. Gifted to me? Why?" Jungmin wondered.

It was certain that it was not someone just messing around Jungmin. He began to thought that the box may have more value than he originally thought as there were so many things with names he never heard of. When he reached to that point, a serious curiosity rose up to the surface.

He thought most of these materials might be very hard to obtain, in or out of the barrier. He could tell because of one of the sacks he was holding, with the name he thought it only exists in the legend.

Wild Ginseng!

(TL note: Most of the names are supposed to be recognized as rare materials of herbal medicine, or the good source of food that recruit's one's energy. Wild ginseng is considered to be one of the best of all)

As he grows up, Jungmin heard about how valuable wild ginseng is, even in the past, before the earth had two moons. Especially elixirs like Ginsengs and Wild ginsengs is considered as the best medical item in VR games that effectively increases the stats of your characters. As VR games are the most trending type of video game, everyone heard about the name of it. Jungmin was able to see the inside of box well after dragging out approximately 2000 sacks.

Jungmin was able to see the inside of box well after dragging out approximately 2000 sacks.

“Plathium!” Jungmin failed to hide his surprise.

Jungmin reached out his hand, he couldn’t believe what he saw. By periodically illuminating blue-violet light, he could ensure that it was plathium.

Plathium is invaluable material that was created with Human’s technology. It had properties of shock absorption, self-maintaining homeostasis, and resilience. Usage of it was not well known to the people.

It was not a substance that you could buy with money. The conditions for a production are too strict, the required materials are very rare. Also, it requires multiple steps of the procedure to be produced, but there were too many variables that the process could go wrong very easily. No Unions could even dream of mass producing it. Contrasted with the dull appearance of the box, the blue-violet illuminating surface of inside told Jungmin how valuable the box was. It couldn’t be all made out of plathium so it should be either coated or plated with, but still, the value of it was unimaginable.

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‘This can’t be just an ordinary box’ he thought.

his eyes were full of excitement. This was not something that ever could belong or gifted to him, not to whom is a borderer without a good relationship with society. There was not even a fraction of a chance. He couldn’t find any type of letter anywhere.

He even checked the inside of every single sack very carefully, but there wasn't even something that looks like a message. His face went red wondering about thousands of sacks and a box with unknown use in his room.

He couldn't find any type of letter anywhere. He even checked the inside of every single sack very carefully, but there wasn't even something that looks like a message. His face went red wondering about thousands of sacks and a box with unknown use in his room.

"Wait a sec. It looks like you can connect something in this hole." Said he.

And he was right! There was definitely a hole on the sideway that you can connect a power line of some sort. He flicked himself off the ground and remembered that there was a weird looking cable between the sacks. He has been thinking it is too random to be there.

"So is this supposed to go here?" Said he connecting the cable.

He could hear the vibration from the box as he connected the cable. It wasn't even connected to outlet yet.

'Does it have dedicated generator as well? If it is, This IS something' he thought.

The box started to vibrate very quietly with low-frequency sound wave. He could tell something started running but still couldn't figure out what the function was. He couldn't see any change inwardly nor outwardly.

Suddenly, there was knock at the door.



Door knocks surprised and woke Jungmin up as he was lost in thoughts about the box. He noticed how dark the room got. Darkness was setting in.

"Huh? When did it get so dark?" said he.

He couldn't see how fast the time was going as plathium reflected the light all over the room. He hurried to the door and opened it up. There was Jinsoo who already walked to the front of his house when Jungmin picked out to see who knocked the door.

Jungmin saw Jinsoo in his dusty cloth and his sunburnt face. His face bore the tiresome of his work.

“Jinsoo!” Jungmin called him out.

“Hey, you were in.”

“Sorry, I didn’t hear you. I was thinking about something.”

“I dropped by to celebrate your coming-of-age day. Congratz on being an adult. I know it is tough despite how it sounds.”

Jinsoo had typical in-barrier youth appearance, who was just as bashful as much as Jungmin was. It was common to see low-class youth like him to live a real life without any hope, but with their dreams and live vicariously through VR games.

“Let’s have dinner together, Jinsoo”

“Nah, sorry but I’ve got things to do. Oh, don’t you play VR games tho? Necomwall is officially releasing a new VR game called ‘Beyond’ tonight.”

“‘Beyond’?”

“Ya, they say they’ve implemented extreme reality that cannot be... Where I should rather say it refused to be compared with any VR games came out so far.”

Jungmin also heard about Necomwall as well. It is one of Top 3 VR game company in the world, Also one of Top 10 business company in the world. They had more financial and political power than a single Union had. Beyond also was not any news to him as well. It was one of the most talked about VR games of late, through internet or through rumors.

8 years ago, thousands of Supercoms were found underground of Mojave Desert. They are believed to be built in the Ages of Doom. Even though there were not much communication between the Unions, Scientists of almost every Union joined together and conducted global scale research on these supercoms.

Necomwall has won the rights to use an enormous number of those Supercoms, and Unions co-invested to develop a new VR game. And they made Beyond.

“Of course, I want to play too, but I’m little short on...”

“Yeah, It’s always the money. It’s pretty expensive I know. They charge \$300 for a one-month subscription and entry-level capsules cost \$3000. I know.” Jinsoo sighed

Jinsoo’s eyes were bright when he was talking about video games. His tiresome was

nowhere to be found. It showed how important the video games are in his life.

“I’m sorry but I gotta go gather up some infos. Nothing was revealed except that it is almost same as real life, but you will gonna need even it is very minor info. Let’s meet up on this weekend instead.” He continued.

Jungmin knew It will not be easy to meet him. It was Jinsoo and many youth’s dreams to earn some fortune through the game or to be the top players, so they strived for gaming on their free time. He was a bit sad but he smiled back. He could understand Jungsoo. Jungmin knew he will do the same once he regains his health and get a good job.

“Yeah, alright,” Jungmin replied.

Jinsoo waived back with an apologetic look and went into his house. His back looked particularly bent today. His heart was overwhelmed with sudden sadness, not only because he could see the burden of life from Jinsoo’s look, but he could see himself in a few years from it. They are too young to accept the lethalgic reality that you won’t be recognized by society as low-class unless you are in the game. That must be the reason why people buy that expensive VR capsules using their few year savings.

“Beyond, huh?...”

A desire to play Beyond at once simulated Jungmin. Human now does not have a civilization that was built on their own technology. This civilization was built based on the legacy of last human species, which was electronic and computer technologies. At the end, the civilization formed the world where only electronic devices and computers were developed. At the time when WW3 was imminent, the wireless technology that connects computer worldwide was developed. AI computers were kept away to a safe place to avoid damage from the war. With these AI computer’s assist, the humanity was able to reconstruct the civilization, unstably.

The times of late AD 21st century. The times of when before World War III broke out. People call those years as “The Ages of Doom”. VR games are well known to be developed for medical treatment and military purposes in the Ages of Doom. Due to the war, VR game had a long blank in its history – also known as Dark Days -, then in HC Year 15, VR games were published and began their first service, and now VR games have over 100 years of history.

VR games provided equal opportunity to everyone as they all start in the same line. This characteristic made VR games to be the role of exit point where people could escape through from harsh reality where traveling and change in social class are very limited.

As the class society solidified as the time goes, people who couldn't adjust themselves to society began relieving stress by playing VR games. For that reasons, Unions encouraged the VR games, and now almost everyone was enjoying it.

Humanity now lives for the lifetime in the barrier due to the polluted environment. Government's closed policy and threats from wild creatures choked humanity's desire for freedom, so it was common to satisfy one's base desires, such as; combativeness, desire for power, honor, achievements, etc. Additionally, if you become one of the Ranker, you will get treated in special ways by people. Union's most popular TV channels were all game related. That made Rankers now to be equivalent to Celebrities in the Ages of Doom. They could earn huge amount of money in short time, enough to move their resident from anywhere in the barrier to District A, or even S.

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For this reason, Unions has been encouraging VR world and people are so passionate about it.

"Dang those guys!" said Jungmin.

It was because thinking about VR games always reminds him two faces he really hates. They were his 4th adoptive parents. Jungmin was adopted for 5 times. Jungmin was in

middle school when he met them. His foster father was a researcher for a global company that produced VR game consoles. He had genius creativity and engineering skills that made him a senior researcher in considerably young age. He was a promising young man.

With his confidence about his ideas with his skills as back up, his limit was at the sky. However, failing heavily funded research projects few times in a row made him be forced to resign. Fail streak record chased him and made unable to get a job, eventually putting him in a danger of getting kicked out of his district. He chose to adopt a child from Union as financial support.

Jungmin lived about 3 years with him, whereas a number of times they met could be counted on the fingers. He always has been busy with his research and experiments, so he didn't get out of his basement very often. A while later, Jungmin found out about the foster's embezzlement to support his research, not only from the money that Union sponsored for Jungmin but also most of all kind of subsidy the Union paid for. His relationship with his partner was pretty bad too. Jungmin's foster mother relieved her stress by abusing Jungmin. That included not giving proper meals, both physical and verbal violence. Every day was like hell for Jungmin living in that family.

Fortunately, Welfare Division officer noticed the child abuse and sent Jungmin to a different family, but it was after it left him the unforgettable memory of those days and a great scar in his mind. The scar remained for a long time, establishing identity crisis about his birth, mistrust in the adoptive family, hatred between him and the fosters. These were not something a youngster on his puberty could handle. It didn't take long time to make Jungmin run away from his last family.

Thinking about VR games and capsules, an idea flashed through his mind. The inside of the box, was enough for a person to lie down similar to how latest full-body capsules are designed.

"No way..." said he.

To think of it as full-body capsules, there were a lot of questions that needed to be answered. First of all, there was nowhere you could connect anything inside of the box. Secondarily, there was no headgear part of the capsule that establishes a connection between your brain and the capsule. Lastly, It doesn't seem to have features that one could lie down on.

Latest full-body capsules had ergonomically designed bed with headgear that connects to your brain electronically. He heard there are top-class suit-like capsules to increase sync rate. but those are the best of the best that cost over tens of thousands of dollars.

But the shape and the size was too perfect not to be a capsule. It was just empty inside.

“But who knows? I am trying it out,” said he with some expectations.

He doesn't know what it does anyway. It cannot be too bad for just checking. He stepped into the box and lied down straight. At the same moment, the cover automatically got closed with a motor sound that you could barely hear. He was frightened for a second but the warmth of platinum plating on his back got him feel much better. Something warm, and comfortable calmed Jungmin's unstable emotions.

The cover was fully closed, the darkness overwhelmed the inside of the box. All he could feel was small noises that he couldn't tell what it was from.

‘At least it is not just a box’ he thought.

Curiosity got stronger than the fear now. He didn't know when, one day, he began to not fear death. Of course he didn't want to have horrible death by being eaten by Harks though. Even if something went wrong and he suddenly dies, there were no regrets to him. It was obvious that his future will be just copying how his neighbors lived their lives.

Then there was a flash.

‘Oh, this is too bright’ he thought, crinkling his eyes.

Bright light chases away the darkness. What appeared in front of his eyes was some kind of light glares. Particles of light were forming an image.

‘Is this a hologram?’ he gasped.

He reached out his hand only to find out he couldn't feel it. As the hand went through the image, he certain that it was 3D video program, also known as the hologram.

‘But who?...’

He focused on the image. It had a face he couldn't recognize, but he found him quite familiar.

It was a man of 50s with dried gray hair, bony face, and impressively deep bright eyes. The image lingered in the air for a while, with the looks of an awkward smile at him.

It seemed to begin the talk, but it didn't. It was just making an odd expression toward Jungmin.

Pity, sympathy, or apologetic

He was staring at Jungmin with mixed expression in his eyes. Soon, the hologram image that was both familiar and uncomfortable soon disappeared, leaving only feeble voice behind.

"You have grown up already! It might sound like an excuse, but I am sorry for how I have been. You are the one I need to apologize for the most. I really hated myself using you as financial support for my research, instead of caring and loving you to just as you were my child. But please, let me tell you that I was blinded by my twisted passion towards the research I have been dreaming the whole time." said the voice.

"Father?"

He realized who's voice it was. It was his 4th foster father's voice. The name was Cheng-il. It was hard to believe the hologram was the image of most hated one. The voice was continued.

"Continuing my research from the money that Union sponsored by your name, I was divorced and my property was attached by the reason of insincerity. What's more is that I was caught hiding plathium from the lab illegally, and I was kicked to the outside of the barrier. But that didn't stop my research. I still had every material I need, so I could continue my research on the basement of one of the buildings."

Jungmin thought it is amazing to see someone who still can continue researching in the basement, after getting divorced and being kicked out of barrier for researching in the basement and never getting out.

"From there, with some assist from the Outers I had acquaintance with, I was able to develop most advanced game capsule. But as I finish my life-long project, I found out I didn't have much time to live. This is probably all karma from what I have done to you and my ex. I wanted to let you two know I am sorry. I left my house for my ex, so that's done. But you, I don't really have many things for you. Only if I could live a few days longer, I could have earned money with this capsule production technology.

His sad voice made Jungmin shut his eyes tightly. Even though Jungmin isn't that warm-hearted, witnessing one's death touched his heart.

“The only thing I can give you is this. I’m leaving you this capsule, the fruit of my entire life.”

“At least I can see you had some bit of conscience left.” Jungmin murmured.

This was not something he would cry for, he thought. But he was touched by Cheong-il’s action and tears caught in his eyes. Maybe because he was more mature than last time he met him. Lonely death of someone who never took a turn in his life came to Jungmin in somewhat different feeling.

“Bell is the fruit of my lifelong work. It is AI mounted, and it has one big difference between Bell and other capsules. Instead of connecting only the brainwave, it floats your entire body in the magnetic field and will connect the entire body using electromagnetic wave. This will allow the capsule to move your body copying the actions you took in a virtual world. This means some portion of the skills, abilities, and gains you earned in a virtual world can be transferred to your body.

Jungmin’s eyes opened wide at hearing that. He couldn’t believe the existence of that kind of capsule. No matter how improved one’s VR characters are, brainwave couldn’t affect one’s body. But if you stimulate entire nerve system and muscles instead of just brainwave, the movements you make in a virtual world can be applied to your body as well. The word revolution is hardly too big a word for this capsule.

“To leave Bell to you, I asked one of my friends to find you. It took some time indeed. When I found you, you were already classified as ‘incompetent’, and you were one step further away from getting kicked out. On the top of that, can you imagine how much I suffered hearing your physical condition was severe because I didn’t feed you on your growing stage? I hope you can get back what you lost because of me. That’s why I am giving Bell to you. You know, I WAS once one of the best capsule researcher in the Ko-1 Union. Bell is so much better than what I originally thought. I’ve prepared a dedicated generator for a power crisis, automatic air circulation system for the optimum environment. If you eat in the game, There is a system that will supply the nutrients to your body. The capsule will adjust your brain wave to beta wave in minimum time if you sleep during the game.

Jungmin couldn’t shut his mouth, nor to let the voice out because he was too surprised. According to his words, a gamer doesn’t have to get out of the capsule at all. They could literally play for 24/7.

“There is a new game called ‘Beyond’, developed and published by Necomewall. Unlike

other VR games, it uses two best AI computers as the Main server and thousands of computers as their Sub. That is the place where reality is presented at its maximum level. It will make you stronger, who was crapped out by us, your parents. The foods, herbs I collected and Bell will help you on your journey.”

Tears were streaming down Jungmin’s cheeks. Despite how much Junmin has been hating him, his foster father has gifted him such invaluable thing.

“I am adding few more words as I’m concerned. Don’t let anyone know about this capsule unless you gain enough, no, superior strength over others. You are still naive, and that will get you in trouble if you ever try to take any profit out of this capsule from Necomwall or other big companies. You can get assassinated by them, very quietly and unnoticed. You must bear in mind that treasure belonged by Weak’s are not a treasure anymore, but a weapon that could kill them. That’s why I designed the outlook unattractive.”

His father was worried about him too. Jungmin was washing his hatred toward his father away with his tears, softening his mind, forgiving one of the people who made his life miserable. The audio continued and spoke out his father’s last words.

“And will you do me a favor? Once you gain enough strength, please bring those Outers into the barrier, who provided me a place to live. I want to do them to right their favor somehow, but I’m out of strength, out of time. Please take care of them, and along the way, please visit my resting place. I want to meet you and see your face before I die, but there is no strength left for me. I am so sorry for what I have done to you. It has been a long time, but I would like to tell you... I love you, my son!”

The voice, it was dying, it got strong at the end, but it faded away like a flame blown off. Jungmin felt mixed feelings. He was feeling the few years long hatred melting away in a short time. Even though he was crying, he didn’t know what he was feeling. He felt dumb by mixture of feelings, and it lasted for a few moments.

For sure the previous families would have done wrong to Jungmin as well. He was not certain what they did but why else would he get re-adopted if they have not? But he met Cheong-il on his most sensitive time, so maybe that’s why he hated him over the others.

It took some time for Jungmin to calm down. His mind was not still clear, but he knew one thing for sure. The biggest reason for his mistrust of the others has been washed away that he suffered from for a long time. He never knew his father was caring him so much. Mainly because he met his father not so many times. He wasn’t sure if they

have ever talked to each other. No wonder why Jungmin couldn't even imagine of his father's mind toward him.

Cracking his fingers, he opened the cover of the box, no, the capsule.

"Well, I am not forgiving you just yet, thinking how much time you let me suffer. If you were lying about the capsule, You will have to feel the hatred of mine for my lifetime. If I could change this weak body through Beyond, that will be when you are forgiven." Jungmin murmured, wiping his tears away.

Chapter 3

Bell, the A.I mounted capsule

After listening to Cheong-il's message, Jungmin came out of the capsule and noticed there was a slight change to the outside of it. A hole with a diameter of about 5cm came into his eyes. He was sure that it wasn't there before.

"So this is the slot," said Jungmin.

As his foster father said, the capsule seemed extraordinary. Even though Jungmin was suffering from a perplex feeling, his curiosity toward the capsule made him do exactly as the audio said. Most of the materials were fine powders that you could not see particles with bare eyes, some were liquid sealed in glass jars. It took quite long time pouring them into the slot because of the number of sacks he had.

"Perhaps it has more space than it looks." said he.

It is quite remarkable how all those materials could possibly go into such tiny space, but that wasn't something he could think of. Strong passion toward VR game Beyond pushed every question down. When the work was done, he lied down in the capsule. The capsule closed automatically and darkened the inside. There was a voice in his ear.

– "Booting initiated. Please relax by breathing deeply and as slow as possible."

It was robotic, but soft and high voice like a child's voice he thought, and it even had some sweet tone as well. It was very likable. It was the voice that will guide him to the world of Beyond, so Jungmin tried his best to calm down his excitement. While he closed eyes and focused on breathing, capsule slowly became active. Jungmin couldn't sense any changes around him in the darkness. Not only because he couldn't see, but the capsule had deafening silence.

First of all, Interior of the capsule began expanding. There were no changes to the outlooks, but the inside got big as much as a quite large living room would be. The capsule stopped expanding inside at that point. The change of volume of the interior is bigger than the exterior denying the law of physics was hidden in the darkness, not

letting Jungmin knew about it.

There was another change going on the capsule at the same time. Micro-sized holes on the capsule surface started absorbing the air of both inside and outside and moisture of it. Changes in the interior were continued as well, without making any sound.

Countless many electromagnetic waves continuously beamed hit Jungmin on the head, arms, legs, and entire body, connecting Jungmin to the capsule, just like connecting the cables. With quite vibrating sound, his body floats slowly and softly, to the center of expanded space of the capsule. It was very similar to floating in no-gravity space, but the body was very stable, his mind as well, so he didn't notice he was in mid-air.

– “Initial boot successfully completed. Awakening Bell. Scanning Captain's body. Confirming identity DNA information. 3... 2... 1...! Confirmed.”

Jungmin was perplexed. Who's Bell, and who's Captain? Moreover, What he was hearing was transferred directly into his head, not to his ears. The voice had precise rhythm, and also was whisper like, that he thought it is very warm and friendly, also very sexy that he really couldn't put in the words. If the voice had an appearance, it would be a beautiful lady.

“Wha... What? Who's Bell?” Jungmin asked.

– “Bell refers to the hyperconscious bio-metallic capsule that you are on board, Captain.”

“So you, Bell are this capsule?”

– “Yes”

Jungmin couldn't say anything for a moment. He presumed from the words of his father that the voice was Bell's, but he couldn't believe when he actually met Bell. Jungmin's hobby was reading and surfing the internet. Not usually a hobby for a Borderer like him, but his weak body didn't let him do other things. From internet and books he heard of a few A.I computers that maintain the barrier and infrastructure of the Unions, but not this small, A.I mounted capsules. Home Coms that controls indoor works is already commercialized. With a few setup, the AI judges when it should do housework like cooking, cleaning, laundering. This useful computer is installed in nearly every houses in District C and above.

But he never heard of 'hyperconscious' computer. Not even bio-metal. That suggests that this metal have both life and its own conscious, but that didn't make any sense to him. It was not a thing, and it is believed to be imaginary. After a long silence, Jungmin opened his mouth first.

“So... Bell, you are saying you are an hyperconscious bio-metallic creature that is capsule shaped, and I am your Captain, right?

– “Every bit of it, Yes, Captain.”

“And my foster father sent you to me?”

– “I believe that was told to you via hologram. All the instruction given to me was to assist your development and be together with you in the future, and that is the absolute command to me.”

“The absolute command? Who ordered you that?”

An ‘absolute command’ is a command planted on the entire system on cyborgs to prevent the abuse. It is a command to prevent the cyborgs from betraying their owners. But, now?

– “Mr. Cheong-il did,” Bell answered

It was his father just as he thought. But can a capsule tech engineer make this enormous thing, alone? He thought. That made no sense to him.

“Who made you? Is that Cheong-il as well?” Jungmin asked

– “No, it was mother ‘Gaia’ who gave me life. Mr. Cheong-il made a body for me.”

Jungmin couldn’t understand. So, Gaia created Bell, but the owner is Cheong-il? Can a man, who embezzled a large sum of national welfares, own a thing like this? He wanted to hear the story behind it. Suddenly a question came into his mind.

‘Gaia? Could it be?’ Jungmin thought.

He knows one thing named ‘Gaia’. Also known as Ancient Mother Computer Gaia (AMCG). It is one of the three greats who made meaningful contributions to the scientific development of new humans. By them, they could create the barrier, and build a new civilization, whereas it had many losses on the other parts than the machinery.

‘Gaia’ is located on WGC Headquarters. After long years of suffering, only 10 percent of its capability remained, but that still made it be in top 30 of all supercoms.

– “Beyond will be publically launched exactly an hour later. Would you like to search information about it?” Said Bell, Waking Jungmin up from the loss of thoughts.

“Oh, right, Beyond”

Jungmin shook off the questions that won't be answered and gave his all the attention to Beyond.

– “By the way, There is a total number of 400,332 posts on the internet about Beyond.”

He never expected that many posts would have been made for the game that has not been even launched yet.

“Then please do the search. But how should I access them?”

Band or ring-shaped, it needs a hard disk and a monitor to access the internet. No matter how Bell had godlike A.I, It will need a medium to show the contents.

– “Think the word ‘Beyond’ in your mind, and look forward in order to see the screen. Captain and I are connected with unique brainwave channel. All you need to do is to command me.”

So access the internet by using brainwave without using any medium. It is considered to be impossible, even to spiritual people. Moreover, Jungmin was classified as ‘incompetents’, which simply means there is no chance for him to do that. Jungmin, however, couldn't even think about doubting it as so many things considered impossible actually happened in front of him.

‘Search Beyond,’ Jungmin shouted in his mind. Soon the information about Beyond appeared in front of his eyes.



ID TaoistMeoteol: There is no info announced publically. Only that it is an ARPG/MMORPG

ID Cubone: experts say u'll need to find a secret class. but they say this game doesn't really have a specific class.

ID Wanhark: But they say sync rate is da best of all time so one's character would move exactly as one's thought. Reality HYPE!

ID Edel: There was a leak saying this game is 'real type'. No one knows what it means tho. But they say using premium whole-body capsule will allow you to use abilities that you obtained in the game later in rl.

ID Vanguard: ^ That's what I heard. Necomwall created another reality, and they hope

Users will experience new life in their world. That kinda means there is no active skills tho.

ID episode : They don't even have active skills? Hype gone. Not even trying this one out.

...



He's been scrolling down hoping for more information, but he couldn't find anything like a walkthrough or tips & tricks for a specific species. Most of the post authors seemed young, and information seemed useless. Unfortunately, Jungmin was focusing on every and each information thinking it might help as he didn't really experience VR games that much. All he could make sure was that seeing how they say 'real type' and 'ARPG', skills and abilities won't automatically activate by itself by simply shouting the name of it.

– “Captain's primary goal is to develop your physical ability.”

It was Bell. Jungmin nodded without thinking.

“Is that so? By the way, it feels like you are a ghost as all I can do is hearing your voice. Do you have a human form as well?” Jungmin asked. As he was in Bell's inside, he might not be able to see it properly, but he wanted to see on display at least. Maybe he wanted to check if Bell is a female.

– “Sure, Captain. Do you want me to display my human form?”

“Yes.”

Bell displayed its human form. He gasped an embarrassment.

“What on Union!”

– “I am sorry?”

Jungmin has been expecting for more, but the one in front of his eyes were a little girl, that only looked like 10 years old. She had a really cute face, twintail, and was wearing bright color one piece dress. Jungmin burst out his laugh. He couldn't believe what he was expecting from Bell, who literally just finished first booting she ever made, and that made him laugh non-stop. Bell had victory over him. Of course, Bell was so perplexed as she didn't know what was going on.

– “Why are you laughing, Captain?”

There was something in her voice. He thought she might be angry at the situation, but he couldn't erase the smile from his face. He did quite naturally imagine a mature, beautiful lady and it gave him refreshing shock seeing Bell's human form. Maybe because of it, Bell's expression on her face and shift in tone was so human like. He noticed there was a change in her voice; it had a higher pitch and the way she talks.

“Haha!, It's just your looks. You are so cute and beautiful. It is just that, don't get me wrong.” Jungmin answered.

– “Huh, I don't think so. There is something else going on” Said Bell, staring at him with arms akimbo as she was showing that she was really angry, but for Jungmin it was just adorable.

“Believe me, there's nothing else, it's just your looks!”

Bell didn't take it as he was telling truth. With a short beep sound, she disappeared. Jungmin was still laughing anyway. He never laughed that much ever before. He wasn't good at expressing his emotions as he didn't get much love from his families. That made him bad at making a relationship with others, at last, he avoided meeting others. He started calling Bell.

“Bell” Jungmin called.

There was no answer.

“Bell?”

– “What is it, Captain?”, said Bell, still showing her anger

“Don't be so angry, Bell! It wasn't like you were strange or something. It was me I laughed at, to whom he imagined wrong what Bell would look like. So don't get upset.”

– “... Bell is not angry. What's the matter though?”

“Well, I will take it.”

Bell appeared her human form again as she was not angry anymore, though her face was cold unlike the last time as she was still upset a bit.

“That's really interesting, so she can express all sort of emotions just like humans?”, he thought.

“How do I develop my ability?”

– “I don’t know that too. It’s secret to everyone before Beyond gets officially launched.

“But you are an A.I computer.”

– “That is true, but that doesn’t mean I have the ability to extract information out of nothing.”

Bell was answering and at the same time, she was trying not to, as she was still a bit angry. That was an adorable act that you could see from little girls. If it had a physical form, he wouldn’t be able to resist hugging her. Thinking of it, he realized Bell’s way of talking is getting closer to little girls rather than how robots do. He’s been thinking that lack of a family didn’t really make him sad, but it would be good if he had a little sister like Bell.

“Well, if that’s so. Then it’s not like I have advantages over other users or something.” Jungmin whined.

– “No, not really. Depending on your capacity, Captain’s sync rate to your character can go up to 99.99%, whereas others have a limitation of 40%. Higher the sync rate gets, more ability and training transferred to your real body. It can be adjusted to some level to prevent physical damage when your character dies, though, you might get some psychological damage. There’s big difference.”

“99.99%?”

– “Yes, of course, that value cannot be reached for now. It will start from 30% like other users, then it would gradually increase depending on your physical capacity. Also, because of deep sleep system and nutrient supply system of the capsule, Captain will be able to game non-stop without logging out,” Bell stuck out her chest with arms folded as if she was boasting.

‘That’s just amazing.’ Jungmin thought and said, “Hmmm, is that so?”

If that’s true, He would get a huge advantage on the others. He doesn’t know about the details, but at least he knew that 99.99% is not the value that one can achieve. No matter if they are using an entry-level capsule or a premium whole-body capsule, they mainly use brainwave and a medium called ‘character’, so theoretically nor practically, sync rate cannot achieve that level. Furthermore, having high sync rate means your physical body will get equivalent damage as you get damage from the VR world. Because of this, no VR games had provided sync rate over 60%, or damage from a VR world could lead to actual death.

It was his foster father’s last conscience that earned him a capsule. Jungmin’s primary goal is to improve his physical ability. It was a thing that he really sought for, and it will

be a thing that he will need most to live a cruel world all alone.

‘Hm, I presume everyone’s goal is leveling up? No, Dark Gamers will be hunting valuables. Well, they will still need a high level to do that, so ultimately leveling up will be the goal.’ Jungmin thought.

But his goal was different. It would be good to be a Ranker, but rationally thinking, that was not possible. There are talented gamers, and they have know-hows built up by playing so many different games. Jungmin was a complete beginner compared to them. He doesn’t have any know-hows, nor good physical ability.

That means he doesn’t have to care about leveling up. He should rather focus on building his body up, studying in various field, and learn passive skills that he could use in real life as well, and as much as possible.

“How should I do physical training?” Jungmin asked.

– “I don’t know either. That’s something captain should do on your own. How is a little girl like me supposed to know that?

‘Damn it’, Jungmin murmured. ‘she must be still angry’.

It must be a mistake on Jungmin’s wording since he isn’t really good at dealing with people. Bell would not hide any information that could help Jungmin. It has not been a long time to get to know each other, but Jungmin believed in Bell.

“So for now, there is nothing I can do else than joining the game?” he asked.

– “That’s right, Captain. I cannot give you any advice since there is no data at all. Once the game service begins, I will be able to collect information.

“Then will it be better to join later?”

Maybe that could be better. Jungmin heard that one cannot go blind without any plan since that might lead to the situation where one will have to delete a character and start over, or might take loads of time for leveling up.

“Well, I am logging in. Maybe I should just look around what’s out there until you gather some data, Bell.”

– “That’s not bad.”

“Then purchase a one-month subscription.”

– “Got it, Captain.”

Bell agreed to Jungmin’s idea. Experiencing what the world is like is better than sitting

and doing nothing. Jungmin logged into Beyond, leaving banking issues to Bell. Jungmin didn't worry about the process of payment as Bell was an A.I. At that moment, he was in the middle of the room with the walls which seemed to be of clouds, or maybe it was made out of foam. There was a voice in his head.

– “Welcome to the world of Beyond. This virtual world is dreamlike and full of wonders. Beyond is the world where your real life is ahead on the earth of fantasy. Allow us to confirm your payment.”

Jungmin told his bank account to the voice. Payments were already made by Bell.

– “Transaction confirmed. Registering an ID for you. Please tell us an ID you would like to use. “

“laugh”, Jungmin replied.

Jungmin had timid and an introverted personality, so he always wanted to laugh out loud. He used to use ‘laugh’ as his id. So he did here too.

– “ID successfully created. Please tell us a Password you would like to use.”

Jungmin told his usual password.

– Next, is creating a character. You may alter the appearance of the character up to 10% of the current state. We have provided you a mirror. Please tell us the part you would like to adjust.

A full-length mirror appeared in front of Jungmin. He didn't want to change his appearance for no real reason, but he heard of some cases of those who lose control of anger related to games and commit crimes in real life, usually revenging crimes. To prevent that from happening, so he altered just a bit.

– “Appearance setting submitted. Are you sure you would like to continue with this appearance?

“Yes,” Jungmin confirmed.

– “This will be your appearance until you delete and create a new character. Natural changes such as length of hair will still be made, and this may be maintained by a user.”

Jungmin was surprised. As far as he knows, that is new to VR games.

– “Please select a name for your character.”

Jungmin thought about it, nothing suitable came up in his mind. Others might have time preparing for one, some might not even have to think about it, but that was not the case for Jungmin as he joined so suddenly.

There was a name came up to his mind.

It was not the name that had special meaning, nor it wasn't the one he thought over and over, but as he spoke it out, there was a strong attraction to his mind, more than Jungmin, the one that he was called for his entire life.

“Haroon.”

– “Mr. Haroon, Allow us to explain vital information you have to know before you join to the actual game. Beyond has enhanced the real mode, unlike other games. Mr. Haroon, on beyond, you...”

The guide explained in details about the game. Although there was only few information went through his years.

First of all, real life and game have 1 to 3 ratio of time. This is similar to other games as well. Secondly, NPCs have high integrated thinking abilities just as humans, and they think players as outlanders who traveled to hunt the monsters down. Thirdly, what differentiates Beyond from other game is that players and NPCs are indistinguishable. Fourthly, there is a stat called ‘Soul Point’, which was new to VR games. SPs can be earned by killing monsters or having some achievement in the world of Beyond, and you can learn skills or get into certain classes only when SP reaches the specific point. SPs cannot be earned by killing those monsters respawns indefinitely, like monsters in common field or monsters in dungeons. This makes players travel far from the starting point to gain SPs by killing the variety of monsters and completing quests in order to convert to a class.

For fifth, it was the relationship between NPCs and players. Players and NPCs can exist in same spacetime but there were a few limitations. Two bold one is that sexual interaction is impossible at all, and scientific knowledge that can harm the basis of Beyond Civilization is prohibited in the world of Beyond.

Sixthly, secret classes don't exist, but new personal classes can be created from base classes without any limitations. Of course, details of it depends and responsibility is on user's capabilities though.

While Haroon was analyzing those in his head, the Guide was on its last words.

– “There are 1,200 starting points. Select the one you would like to start from. Starting points are diverse from the small village to the capital city of the empire.”

This became another problem to him. Jungmin carefully skimmed over the big map that has appeared in front of his eyes.

For this kind of game, it was almost like a cliché to start from a little countryside village and move to bigger towns and cities as they level up. But Beyond had the capital city of the Empire as a starting point too. Haroon couldn't find out why because he thought there was not many things to do for a level 1 newbie.

Experienced Gamers might already have guessed where they should start, but Haroon had no idea where to choose.

– “If you don't have any place in mind, or 5 minute passes without any decision, the starting point would be set randomly. Restarting or changing a starting point might lead to the penalty of stat decrement, increased subscription fee and more. If you still would like to restart or change a start point, Please visit our official site and consult with our GMs.

“I... will start from a capital city of the Empire.

For instance, Haroon asked Bell to collect data and information about the game. He thought it would be better to look out what kind of world Beyond has to provide. You would need to go to a capital city to see what the world looks like.

– “Mr. Haroon, your starting point is set to a capital city of Teronn Empire. We hope you have a pleasant journey in the world of Beyond.”

Chapter 4

Nice to meet you, Elser!

“Whoa!” Haroon shouted.

His eye widened as unfamiliar surroundings appeared so suddenly. He was standing in the middle of the square, which seemed to be enormous even at a first glance. The size seems to be a few kilometers wide. He also could see numberless people of numerous races with different costumes gathered in the square.

“The Middle Ages?”

And yes, it was.

The style of architecture and the way the large buildings were built with bricks or stone slabs were very similar to what he learned in history class.

He was expecting it to be a medieval themed game as it was most common theme the VR games are based on, but actually standing in the middle of the square and the scale of the square with medieval style felt marvelous, even dreamlike.

“This is amazing!”

He, shocked, was in idle for a considerably long time, and when he got used to the landscape of the buildings, he drew attention to his surroundings.

The square was crowded with so many people; Lovers dilly-dallying, an old couple enjoying the sunlight, kids who seemed to be friends to each other, the weary travellers who looked worn-out from the long trip from different continent, street food sellers, street musicians performing with their hat set in front of them, and artists drawing portraits. All these exotic views caught his eyes. Though no one was giving him any look nor attention to the sudden appearance of him.

He stopped looking around and closed his eyes. He spread his arms wide, wanting and trying to feel the new world with his entire body. The feeling of warm, feathery soft sunlight that can never be felt in the city covered by the barrier, and word carrying the wind that swims and flows in the sea of people surrounded him, just as he could grasp

it with his hands.

Everything felt same just as the real world, from the slabs of the street to the walls of the buildings. The hardness and cold surface of it made it difficult to realize that he was in the virtual world. Just as they were advertising, they have implemented extreme reality that could never be compared to VR games Haroon has played. Haroon thought he never wanted to go back to dusty windy District F. Even if it was District A where union offered everything for convenience. Even if it was District S.

“I AM HAROON, NOT JUNGMIN ANYMORE!!!”

As he shouted like a crazy one, his mind opened wide that he could face the new world as if his life changed.

As if he was mesmerized, he wandered around the square with his eyes, nose, and ears opened, seeing different people, smelling the foods, hearing people talking to each other. As Haroon’s main goal playing the game was different than the other gamers, he was not obsessed with leveling up. Because the fresh and fantastic world of Beyond gave endless sensation to him, he couldn’t realize he was in the virtual world and lost track of time.

The sun was setting.

Between the tall towers of the palace where the emperor lives, the red burning sun was hiding his face.

Haroon has never seen a sunset before. Only the blurred silhouette of it because of the dust. He was admiring the great nature. Indescribable excitement rose in his mind that he wanted to shout out loud. The view that was only in the picture, was happening in front of him, real time. His mind was full of emotion. The sun went over, and street lights of the square were being ignited here and there. That was when he could cool down.

“Well, first things first, I should check my status.”

Time just flew by while he was not himself admiring beautiful, great nature. As he checked out how real the environment of Beyond is, he should be focusing on the game.

“Open status window!”

With a simple command, the status window popped up.

Username: Haroon
Race: Human
Class: –
Level: 1
Title: –
Health Point: 150
Mana Point: 150
Strength: 5 Stamina: 5
Intellect: 9 Wisdom: 5
Luck: 7 Agility: 5
S.P.: 0 Hunger: 98/100

As expected, the values of stats were lower than he anticipated for. He was worried about it as he heard that Beyond applies player's actual capability, and it was not far from what he expected for. Stats were given up to 10 for newly created characters, so except intellect and luck, stats were quite low.

Soul Point (S.P.) were empty and there was 6 kind of stats for now. He wondered how many kinds of stats he could get. Even though Haroon wasn't really familiar with games, he knew that stats take a major part in the game.

'Intellect is high probably because I've been reading books, not going outside, and are the others on average at least? Guess I will find it out soon. Well, it's not gonna be higher than other users. In Beyond, are stats gained by leveling up? or is it gained by doing certain action repeatedly?' Jungmin thought.

And indeed, that was most important thing to him as stats are character's ability digitized into figures. Speaking of numbers, since there is hunger system he should care about eating too. Tutorial he took earlier told him if hunger drops below 10%, H.P. might drop rapidly or even die from it.

It's time for him to check what he has.

"Open Inventory Window!"

1 Wooden sword
1 Casual cloth
10 Bread
Identity plate

10 Silver

“What? This is it?” he was disappointed.

He sighed. There were 32 slots in total, and only 5 were filled. No other thing can describe a poor beginner more than this. Thin shirt and cotton pants with a sandal he was wearing were most shabby clothing of all people in the square. Well, yes it is more strange to have nice clothing as a total beginner.

‘Hmm, A wooden sword, I guess it is pretty similar to other games that you level up by killing monsters.’ he thought.

First things first, he took out the only weapon he had and opened stat info of it.

“Wooden sword stat!”

Wooden sword
Class: Common
Attack Damage: 2~5
Durability: 15/15
Requirement: none

An ordinary wooden sword crafted without much care. But depending on the user, killing power might vary. It is made with considerably solid wood.

‘I should be collecting info as well. But, where are the other players?’

The square was quite big, and there were a lot of people, but he couldn’t see other outlanders(players) with clothing just like him. Beyond didn’t have the title and name indication of NPCs that the other games usually have, so it was even harder to find.

But as the time goes, people with shabby clothing – which was one of the points that players differed from the NPCs – naturally gathered to one point

Maybe all players thought the same thing, that it is safer to stick together as they don't know anything about this world.

“Hey! Have you find anything yet?” A stranger asked hitting Haroon's shoulder.

It was quite painful that he couldn't hide cringe between his eyes, but Haroon couldn't show his anger and shook his head. In reality or in a game, he was still too bashful. Users shared their informa... well at least talked about what they found out.

“Harry, even you didn't find how to level up?”

“Well, yes.” a man who was called Harry replied with a sigh.

“But you reached Ranker of the Another World. If you can't, who can among us?”

“We shouldn't have chosen this starting point. This city is just way too large it takes ages to walk to the hunting field. So inconvenient.”

Users were mainly talking about hunting. Haroon walked between the users and gave all his attention to the talking, and it seemed no one found hunting field yet. Come to think of it, if they found a hunting field, they won't be here. They will be hunting. At that moment, someone walked toward the crowd of users and shouted at them, frowning.

“For Union's sake! They won't allow us to leave the castle. The guards won't let you leave saying we are too weak that we will die right away, no matter how we beg we are going to hunt!”

“Dang! Then how are we supposed to gain experience?”

“Maybe we need to complete some quests or train at the training hall?”

“I've been asking around, and no NPCs seemed to know what training hall is. Is there one after all?”

“What kind of game never provides any info? Have they ever did beta testing?”

Disgruntled voices burst out here and there. Since there was no info provided in prior, everyone seemed to be assuming Beyond will have the similar pattern the gamers should take in other games as well. And it wasn't.

“And from who can you get the quest?”

“No idea. There is no NPC giving out quests at all. NPCs of Beyond are really like other

users, not NPCs. No idea how to play this game.”

“Maybe I should log out and what others did in the different area. We don’t know anything at this point.”

“You got the point.”

People decided to log out and search for more information as quite long time has passed already. It hasn’t been long that the Beyond is launched, but there were already some people posting info, even it is minor things, hoping to gain some reputation, or just to show off.

Most of the users began logging out, but Haroon stayed and stood in the corner of the square, and stared at the night sky. It is clear that he was in a game, seeing unfamiliar surroundings and environment, but Haroon was so confused because it was more real-like than reality.

‘This is just so real. Even more than the reality.’ he thought.

As his thought, you could never find anything unnatural from the NPCs, even compared to the users. Except that they are not surprised by users appearing and disappearing, they were not any different from the real people enjoying the night sky.

‘Let’s look around for more. I’m not in hurry of leveling up. Finding the way to develop myself should be my first goal.’

Haroon left the square with a comfortable mind. The main road was dividing into four, which two were still bright. Haroon guessed out that those two were the merchant district. He leisurely continued his light steps to one of them.

“Wow! That is some kind of big deal!” Said Haroon.

The main road was wide enough for four carriages to pass at the same time. The sides of the road were full of shops selling every different kind of things. Not even the main road, but lanes and alleys were full of shops too. Haroon couldn’t figure, not even guess out how big the merchant district is.

There even were numerous shops selling products you cannot find in real life now. Handicrafts were the main ones. It was hard to find hand-made products in real life. No matter how detail it was, there were no products that computers with precision machines cannot make. Woods, metals, ores, papers, leather and glued handicrafts,

there were so many kinds, and they were so beautiful, probably because of the cares of the craftsman.

Haroon couldn't close his mouth wandering around the merchant district. Every shop had full of different stocks, and the roads were so lively, full of sellers and buyers.

'I really want to live in a world, if it is like this!' He thought. 'Only if I had money, No, only I had a job to earn money, this is the world I want to live in.'

Considering how hard it is to get a job in real life, This world was full of dreams.

Unlike other games, there were no one giving him an attention, nor any interest. If the city doesn't have any hunting ground, There is, of course, training halls, special events or NPCs giving out quests that could substitute the absence of hunting ground. It wasn't so true in this world.

Why did Necomwall create a virtual world like this? What do they mean by they have not created a game, but they have created another reality? Haroon's eyes gleamed for a moment while thinking of principal things.

'I should get a job, No, I should find a thing to do. To settle down in this world just as if I am living another life, I should melt into this world just like real world.

What he wanted to do is not only to train his body but to have an opportunity of education that he couldn't have because of unwilling accidents. To do that...

'I need to learn. Where should I be heading? Of course, to the school!. Damn, I really need overall knowledge about this world.' he thought.

Haroon looked around. He couldn't dare to ask anyone because they seemed too busy. Of course, Haroon was not really good at conversing as he was too shy.

Soon, a lady came into his eyes. She had an aura of, extraordinary? He didn't know how to describe her in the words.

Tall height for a female and glamorous figured lady was wearing a leather armor and was carrying a long sword on her back. She didn't seem to be a knight. She was walking and looking around with idly steps like as she had nothing to do.

'She doesn't seem to be a user... She has a sword, does that mean she's a swordswoman?'

Haroon couldn't tear his eyes away from her. Her existence and aura were quite charismatic and unique. Her walks without hesitation made people stay away from her route, which made her existence stand out even more. She was wearing a full-flowing blouse in her armor, wide leg leather pants and wide leather belt. She was walking here and there, talking to people, picked up a blue fruit from a fruit store and ate it, chose a bracelet from an accessory store and wear it. Without paying.

'Wait, what is wrong with this girl? Is she a gangster of this district?' he thought.

He couldn't make sure of her identity, but it was clear that she and shop owners know each other very well. Many people walking in the street knew her too. He could tell because he saw there were a lot of people talked to her. They were just probably saying hello though. While watching her moves, Haroon noticed three people with a suspicious aura.

'Assassins?' he thought

Probably not. Assassins usually don't appear in the bright place like this. Moreover, they won't be showing their hostility in an open area. They were watching the lady behind the goods displayed high up in the front of a shop. Haroon saw a reflection of light from their waist. It was definitely a weapon. When he saw that, he felt that their looking of the lady was full of murderous intent. The lady didn't seem to notice, but Haroon saw and conclude. They, have targeted her.

'It doesn't seem good. I've got to tell her.' He thought it is better to tell her that she is in danger, no matter what kind of person she is.

He was on the first step when those three guys began sneaking on the lady, hiding in a crowd. Haroon hurried his moves. One of them was putting his hand in his coat, which seemed to be the preparation of their attack. The lady was about to encounter them, but she held a person's hand and started talking friendly. The assassins approached her back, Haroon saw a pointy knife when they took their hands out from the coat and shouted throwing his entire body on one of the assassin's back.

"Look out!" Haroon shouted.

"Ugh!" an assassin cried.

Haroon falls to the ground after hitting the guy with hair tied with golden string. Alone.

The assassin was surprised and swung his sword toward Haroon and cut a flock of Haroon's forelocks. The lady noticed the existence of three assassins.

"Chaaaaap!" She shouted as she took her sword out and swung it.

The blades struck together and made metallic sounds. Haroon couldn't see what was going on as he fell down, but from the sound of it, he knew the lady, fortunately, blocked the assassin's attacks.

"Run!" It was a man's voice.

"Fuck! You fucking burglar screw everything up!"

"You fool! The witch's eyes are on us!"

Only making one attempt killing her, they ceased their attack and ran away to different directions. The lady was about to chase them but stopped as she saw Haroon getting up unsteadily. Haroon's nose was bleeding, he must have hurt hitting the ground.

"Are, are you OK?" Haroon asked the lady, with full of pains from his knees and nose.

"Yes, thanks to your help." she replied.

Her looks on Haroon was somewhat strange and was far from thankfulness. So is her voice unlike Haroon's expectation. It felt being yelled at after toiling for a work. Haroon relieved the feeling thinking that he wasn't wanting to be paid back, nor for justice.

"I'm glad you are safe." Said he.

The lady stared at him as a reply. Haroon couldn't figure out where to look, so he just stood there like a dork, waiting for the nose to stop bleeding.

"The name's Elser. Thanks to your help, I was able to avoid the danger." It was her who broke the silence.

"I'm... Haroon. I just saw them watching y... ou for an opportunity to kill you so..... Do you know them?"

"They are probably from Dark Merchant Guild."

"Dark Merchant Guild?"

Haroon was murmuring the name in his mouth because he heard it for the first time. Elser didn't seem to think like that and was giving scary look at Haroon. Her gaze got intense, Haroon got chills.

'Is she thinking I'm one of those guys?' He thought.

At once, Haroon thought wouldn't it be better to get away from where he stood. It just wasn't the attitude of someone who just got help would make toward someone who helped them. Her gaze was very uncomfortable too.

He got angry a bit.

It was all because it was an emergency situation. If he was making a rational decision, Haroon, who saw a blade, wouldn't have thrown his body to the attackers. He refused to yield at the gaze and look directly at her face.

At close view, he could see how sharp-features Elser had. Widely waved silver colored hair was tightly tied which seemed clumsy, but it was good because it wasn't so formal. There were few points of face and neck bothering his eyes, but he couldn't see clearly as he had to look away because he couldn't stand her stare anymore.

After sharply staring at every corner of Haroon's face, Elser finally disarmed the doubts and smiled brightly at Haroon.

"Thank you. Without your help, I could have been stabbed." Said Elser.

"No, don't mention it. I was just worried..."

She seemed to have figured out who the attackers were. Also, her firm confidence was shown very well on her dignified figure. He thought maybe she didn't need any help at all.

"Are you a traveler?" Elser asked.

"Sorry? Oh yes, I am."

In virtual worlds, users are considered as travelers. Of course, NPCs doesn't know he is a user, but Elser thought he is a traveler, probably because of Haroon's shabby clothes.

"You may have saved my life from them, what can I do to return your favor"

"You don't have to. I don't think I did so much."

Haroon felt chills from her sudden change in attitude and smiling at him. He thought it was best to avoid her as much as possible. However, what Elser continued with her

words changed his mind.

“It seems that you are a new traveler who just arrived here. Just tell me if you want some help. I will help if there’s anything I can.”

That changed his view on her as well. She might be a lady with a kind mind, rather than first impression he had. It seemed she is warm hearted. Well, he didn’t have enough courage to check the beauty of her face.

“Well then. Indeed I am new here, so may I ask a few things? Said he.

“As much as you want.” She replied.

She giggled, surprised as if she wasn’t expecting that. She liked how this new traveler is intending to only ask few things, even though she said she would help anything she could.

“Well, I was going to get some Ice cream. Let’s talk about it eating some.”

“Sounds good. But I don’t have a lot of money though...”

He wanted to hear a lot of things about this city, well, this world, so there is no reason not to rejoice her suggestion. He might be able to hear a lot from the talks while eating ice cream. But there was only 10 silver in his inventory. He was just worried about it as he doesn’t know how the price is like.

“Tee hee! I owe you a lot so I should be treating you. And Ice cream isn’t so expensive.”

“I can’t let that happen. We’ve just met, and of course, I should be treating you as I’m the one being helped.”

Her expression changed to somewhat strange. She realized that he isn’t thinking he helped her. Elser has not told him who she is, but it seemed he already has guessed who she is.

“It is really important to me to know anything about here.” Said Haroon.

Haroon was intending to ask general information about the place and how to get some education. Of course, Bell could find it out, but there is no way that kind of information would be up on the internet already.

“Let’s go whoever pays it. I happened to be boring as my friend went out for a date

already when I got to castle late as I was busy today.”

Elser reached out her hand to Him first. He hesitated for a bit but held her hand at the end.

She was more active than she looks. If her hands weren't so knotty and rough, he might have thought she is just an ordinary lady. Maybe she is broad-minded too.

“Haroon is an odd name. I'm not from here as well. When I was a little kid, I followed my parent who is mercenaries, all the way from Vottnis.”

How could he know where Vottnis is? It is important to have right subject to converse, and It doesn't work already. Fortunately, Elser was open minded and was not the type who talks watching the opponent's reaction. She saw Haroon's confused face and said

“You said you are a traveler and It seems you don't know Vottnis, where is famous for producing excellent wines.”

“Ah... It is my first time to travel so I don't know about anything. Even the Empire...”

“Oh my, then you are a complete beginner?”

“Yeah.”

He replied with a weak voice, but Elser wasn't bothered by his attitude. When they got to the Café, he was more concerned about the price rather than the conversation with Elser. It couldn't be helped because of his timid personality.

“Thank Union!”

An ice cream cost 80 bronze. He didn't know how much 1 silver is, but usually, it is 100 bronze. Only after then, there was a place in his mind to see around and sighed a relief.

“How old are you, though?” Elser asked.

He wasn't sure why she is wondering that.

“I am 18. But why...?”

“Hehe, You are a same age as me. I guessed so. Then can I talk to you informally?”¹

“Sorry? I... Oh, sure.”

“Haha! You are really like a fool.”

“Pardon?”

He thought he chose wrong one to talk to. She was talented in bamboozling people around. This lady hurt his brain. The lady who is very mature and has a strange area made Haroon go crazy.

“Sorry if I am being too friendly to you as a person who’ve just met. Please allow me. You were the first man talked to me first. No man does in this town.

“Well that’s...”

She was active enough to talk informally right way.¹ And she says there is no man talk to her? He wasn’t sure what she meant.

‘Maybe she belongs in the dark world.’ he thought.

“And moreover, you throw your body to alert the attack. You’ve saved my life,” said she, smiling and blinking her eyes.

However it sounds, she was saying it as a joke. In fact, he wasn’t sure if he actually has been helped. From her attitude, it seemed that she was already expecting it. It was hard to believe yet, but she also seemed she had the ability to sense that. He is probably right. Haroon was confident with his observation.

“Well, I belong to more of... rough side in this metropolis. I do look rough and I caused a lot of troubles, so no mans even try to talk to me anymore. Except for those capital city guards. Well, they are more like friends, not mans.” Said Elser.

Haroon just kept nodding. There wasn’t much to talk. He doesn’t know who she is, so there was no word to respond.

‘Looks rough? She doesn’t seem so.’ he thought.

A waiter came and turned on a small lamp which seemed a magic lamp. With bright light, Haroon was able to see her face more clearly. She was interested about that, and looked his face and said

“You are braver than I thought. Is it OK even I told you I am a scary person? Are YOU fine with that?”

“Sure am.”

As he was speaking in a calm tone, Elser was pleased about it and smiled. Her face was

not so pretty, but sharp, burning bright eyes were really charismatic. And her face is...

‘What’s that?’ Haroon thought.

He could see something odd about the left side of her face. There was a long scar that wasn’t easy to see without a bright light or a daylight. From the forehead to right above the lips. There were long scars even on the chin and right below her ears. As she smiles, those scars wiggled.

There were even more scars. There was one on the deep part of her collarbone that was exposed, one on the neck. Now he could understand why the men wouldn’t talk to her. That, however, was not enough to make Haroon feel scary as he saw so many horrific corpses working in the cremation. Only the pity of having that many scars as her titles, considering her age.

‘Am I odder not to be surprised by that?’ he thought.

It felt oddly strange to feel calm seeing those many scars and her sharp eyes.

“Well, you said you’ve got things to ask?”

“Yup! Actually, I don’t really know about the world I am living in. Whatever it is, tell me about anything you know about this world...”

“Hmm, and it turns out you are a complete hillbilly. Is that all you’ve got to ask? But you didn’t have t... Well, You’ve found a right person. I know every bit of this city.”

“And if you would, about the world as well. I... I was living in a q... quite remote village.”

Because of stuttering, Elser didn’t find it suspicious about Haroon not knowing anything about the world. There were plenty of people not knowing about the world except the around of their living place. There was a feudal system which limited moving and hostile monsters are spread out in the world. So if it is a place where soldiers or mercenaries are hardly found, it might be more common.

“Don’t worry! I will tell you everything.” Said Elser.

He found her confidence quite cute. He suddenly wondered her identity, but he didn’t dare to ask. Haroon focused on Elser’s voice as he eats ice cream.

The planet the virtual world is based on consist of three continents and four oceans. The continent he is on is Sirus. Muro continent is on the east, and Tyres is on the west.

However, the oceans were twice larger than the continents, so there was no continental interaction except very few merchants.

On Sirius, there is three Empires and 31 countries. The one that Elser and He were in is Teronn. The empire was established 801 years ago. Depending on the situation, the Empire and other two check each other by becoming allies or enemies. Other two Empires are established around the same time. Some historians claimed the first Emperors of each Empire were friends to each other.

Sirius had more mountains than the fields, and there were a lot of big-scale raids by monsters were quite frequent, so there weren't many reasons to have a war. From common monsters like Orcs to the Trolls or ogres well known for being superior monsters. And their large habitat is widely spread all over the continents, so their raids on humans were quite frequent. So empire scale wars are very rare.

'Hmm. In this world, humans are not the most superior species. This state might be better.' Haroon thought.

The war between the humans won't occur a lot if they have a common enemy. In history, there were several wars killing each other between the humans, but that wasn't the case in this world. If they don't cooperate, they won't be able to survive.

And Phiren, which is the capital city of Teronn is a large city with a population of millions, and the center of Empire's economy, culture and politics. It was a city with the great role.

"But why did you come all the way to Metropolis? I don't suppose you are lost, but it doesn't seem you have ability nor qualification to travel."

"Well, that's..."

He didn't know how to explain to Elser, who must be an NPC. She, however, is so real to be an NPC, so he had no idea how to deal with. In previous games he played, NPCs didn't really have an expression, and they were more like guides who watches and assists user's game experience. But it was different in Beyond. They are the live existences who didn't so differ from him.

"Actually..."

Haroon was about to reveal his identity as an outlander from the another world, but

he lied because he didn't know how she will take that. It felt odd to lie to her, but he couldn't do else as it was like living in a real world. If it was one of the other games, he wouldn't have to concern about this as NPCs already know that users are the users.

Haroon said he is an orphan, and lived in a deep mountain that is far from the metropolis that takes about a week, and he has been living with his grandfather who is so sick that he couldn't even move. As the mountain was so bleak, there weren't so many monsters so except for the foods, there haven't been so many problems surviving. But after his grandfather has died, he couldn't live there alone so he left his place and came to the city.

"Oh my! I'm really sorry to hear that. That makes sense how you know nothing about the world."

She nodded several times with expression full of sympathy.

"My body is like this as I was lack enough eat. You know, for two days I've been thinking that to survive in this world I will have to study and learn a lot of things. Do you know a place for that? 10 silver is all I have though."

Elser's expression was changing several times with pitifulness, and as if she made her mind, she drank the juice bottoms up. Her eyes were burning with something.

"Alright! I'm recommending you because I liked the way how you didn't scare my looks."

"T... to where?"

"Just listen following me. They will be closed soon."

Haroon hurried his way out holding Elser's hand.

There were still a lot of people doing their things on the street. He noticed a thing different from walking alongside her.

People were avoiding Elser's eyes as if they saw something wrong. Some people were hardly looking at her with fear in their eyes. Oddly, quite a lot of people with scary looks even ran away from her as soon as they saw her.

'Who is this lady?' Haroon thought.

Considering her scars she wouldn't be an ordinary lady, but those shouldn't be the reason for the people to avoid a girl with some charismas. Even if she belonged in a dark world, such as gangsters, this kind of reaction was a little bit too much. Wondering about it, Haroon walked about twenty minutes and arrived at a big building.

The walls were so long that he couldn't see the end of it. He could see the buildings with vivid outline through the chinks of the main gate, which was being watched by two guards.

"Stop right ther... Hugh! MISS!" One of them approached and retreat right away noticing Elser.

"Yeah, that's me. Open the gates!"

The guard gave the sign over the gates, and the giant iron gate opened slowly.

"What is this place?"

"Well, one of the places I usually stay."

Elser's explanation didn't answer his question. Why she brought him here, and who she actually is. He walked with her again, and a building lighted with magic lamps came into their sight.

"This is the HQ of Mercenary Guild of Teronn Empire." Said Elser

"I see. The scale is amazing."

"Yup. There is a mercenary academy inside as well. The best place for a weak traveler, like you, to learn about the world, and learn several knowledge and skills to survive all alone."

"But... why?"

"Hehe, This is the place you'll want to go. The building over there is the mercenary academy. Some assholes call it mercenary training camp."

He guessed out that she meant Knights by assholes, but he didn't say anything. He could have never guessed even in the dreams that the place she would bring him to is an academy where they train some mercenaries.

"And This, is the place you usually stay?" Haroon checked."

"Yup. Usually, I would be in directing tour between the mercenary camps, but If I have time, I escorting the merchant as a leader of the squad, like today."

“Really?”

Yes, she does have some scars but he could have never guessed that she would be an instructor guiding the mercenaries. It was hard to believe she would be able to teach sword skill to others considering how she was not even 20.

“I will take care of everything, so just stand right next to me and do nothing. Then you will be able to learn the knowledge, and learn the skills, just as you wanted,” said Elser.

Haroon couldn't say anything, but to nod. He was dragged into some place he could not think of. As they enter the building, they could see a wide place. With some tables and desks at the end of the room.

“Ayyy, Elser! You got back early today.”

He thought there was no one, but someone at the desk found her and greeted.

“It wasn't so fun today. It felt so empty without Seria, and I couldn't find any pal making trouble in the merchant district.”

“I suppose so. Those folks must be sparing their bones and flesh as I beat the RedEagles up. But be careful, their superior guild, Dark Merchant folks might be sharpening their teeth to target ya. Those holed jerks use poisons as well, so one stab, that's the end.”

“You are too late. This guy over here saved my life today.”

“What?” he shouted, surprised by Elser's words, jumped out of the chair and ran to her.

He looked about 30s and seemed hard as if his body was made out of muscles. His overreaction showed how close they were.

“Are you okay? Are you not hurt?” said the guy.

“If this friend didn't alert me those folks it would have been dangerous. I saw those blue blades as they run away, probably the poison you just mentioned. Only if it went wrong, I could have been dead.”

“That's a relief. If something happened to you... Ugh. my heart's pounding just thinking of it.”

“Hehe!”

The guy seems to care Elser so much. Haroon thought if they might be lovers, but he

couldn't picture it. Probably just very close friends.

"By the way, did you just say 'friend'?" the guy asked.

"Mmhm! Yes. We are friends."

"Friend? To Elser?" ²

This muscular, hard bodied giant's face was distorted as if he saw something wrong. Haroon didn't know what Elser was talking about, so he just stood there, saying nothing.

"Why? Can't I have friends?" Said Elser, raising her eyebrows as if she was shamed by his attitude.

"Yes, Yes you can! This was just my first time hearing that word from you. This pal does look weak, but he is a man. A boyfriend? To Elser, the Silver-haired Witch? How can I not be surprised?" He cried, raising his hands up in the air.

She is being called as Silver-haired Witch? She must be someone then.

"Hahaha! We are just friends. It's no boy-girl relationship so don't get it wrong. We became friends because he is the only man who has not feared even after seeing my face."

"Really? This weak pal didn't?"

"Yeah! He even smiled at me."

The guy wasn't saying it, but Haroon could see 'No way!' in his face. Yes, she looks scary, not girly because of the scars, but it was hard to believe no man ever talked to him. But seeing the guy's reaction, it seemed true.

'Is Elser that dangerous?' Haroon thought.

He couldn't understand no matter how deeply he thinks about it.

"My name is Haroon." He bowed at the guy, who was still dazed as he got hit by a hammer in the back of the head, seeing Elser and Haroon alternatively.

"Ah! I'm McKin, the admin of Merc Academy. You are not really like how you look. Anyway, it is nice to meet a brave guy."

McKin looked over Haroon up and down with strong curiosity. Elser didn't seem to like it and pulled McKin's arm.

"We need to talk," said Elser to McKin.

They walked to one of the corners. Haroon, left alone, was still in a little bit of daze because he couldn't keep up with what's happening. But soon, those two's voice got loud and Haroon could hear their conversation.

"You want to put him in a bazic training course? Elser, are you serious?"

"Deadly serious. He is weak because of poor diet, but it could get better if he get some training going. Also, one doesn't really need physical ability to be a mercenary. Like Mr.Geros. He is rather frail but he is still a first class mercenary."

"Well, he is, because he is wise, and I don't think this pal's body can take the training course."

"He does look weak but I've got a great feeling about this. Seeing how he calmly faces me and not fearing those assassins even after seeing their daggers covered with poison, He does have some guts. You know I have a good eye for picking up people."

"Yes, you do, but not for this time. He doesn't look like he can pass it. Yes, you are on some position but your recommendation isn't enough to accept him in."

"You know that's why I'm asking you, don't you... Oh, right! If you think it's gonna be a pain in the ass, how about accepting him as a work-trainee?"

Elser's eyes brightened with what she thought it was a good idea.

"Work-trainee? Right, that might do. I won't get in trouble too. Doesn't cost anything as they are paying the fee by doing labors. That'll do." Said McKin, nodding.

He didn't know about the details, but he could see that Elser was trying to help Haroon to take a basic training course.

"Elser, you don't have to if it is for me. We've just met... and I don't want to be a trouble to you." Said Haroon.

And he meant it. He wasn't dragged all the way here. He did want to rely on Elser as she knew more than he does. But that was only because the game wasn't kind enough to tell the users what to do. He didn't want to be a burden to Elser for any reason. It was just too much.

"Don't worry about it. You don't have to thank me too, 'cause it is gonna be really hard to take the course and laboring at the same time."

“But I wouldn’t be able to take it without your recommendation. Thank you so much.”
“Don’t. I am helping my first friend, and I’m using my rights. You don’t have to feel any pressure about it. You even tried to save my life.”

Haroon couldn’t say anything after that. Even though it hasn’t been much from when they met, she’s been thinking Haroon is a friend to her, so he thought It would be best to be a friend. He was certain that the course he will be taking would be perfect for what he longed for. Of course, he couldn’t thank enough to Elser for making that opportunity. Haroon pleasantly could accept Elser’s offer.

“Thanks, Elser. I won’t be a burden to you.”
“I said don’t. What else are friends for?”

They smiled at each other exchanging warm glances. Being an NPC or a user didn’t really mean anything now.

“Haha! I’m glad Elser finally befriend with someone. Haroon, just pass dis course, and Elser and I will put you on fire.”

McKin laughed out loud. The giant scar on McKin’s face made him look like he is smiling.

“The course you are taking is 3 months long. Bad timing tho, I’ve taken the leader’s place of mercenary camp directing tour for this term so It would be hard to meet you again in a near future, but I’ll give some words to the trainers I’m close with. Tho, ‘cause the special trainers are in charge of the basic course, I cannot give you more help, but if you really, REALLY need something, ask McKin for help.” said Elser.
“Thank you so much!”

Haroon didn’t have much else to say.

Only good things were happening to Haroon, both about the capsule and meeting Elser. It felt all the sufferings he had were paying off, he couldn’t hide tears in his eyes.

“Bud, now you are making me cry. Anyway, just take this course well and see you outside.” Said Elser, smiling despite what she said.

McKin wasn’t in charge, but he kindly accompanied with Haroon to the dormitory of Basic course and talked with the trainers for a while, and guided to the room he will stay. Elser was also a trainer but she couldn’t enter the men’s dorm.

It was sad to part with Elser, but Haroon was nervous and anticipating at the same time. Fortunately, the course happened to begin tomorrow, that he didn't have to join in the middle of course. In fact, Haroon knew very well how hard it is to join a community that is already formed. He had suffered from it by transferring to different schools. Students usually didn't welcome a new member, and Haroon couldn't even try to join them as he was too shy. He always ended up being left out.

The dorm he was placed in was for the magicians, so he had to wear mana-restraining cuff, and he had to pretend he was one of them.

'The room is quite big. I like it.' He thought.

The room McKin guided him to had a bed, desk and chair, small dresser and even a W.C with bathtub. It was bigger and more comfortable than his house in real life.

'Woah, The Mercenary Academy must have lots of money, seeing how they assign only one person per one room like this.' he thought. Haroon couldn't close his mouth.

Because Elser stayed at the HQ, McKin told Haroon some basic things and went back. Haroon was used to being left alone so he didn't care about it. He lied down on the bed feeling tired.

"It was really fortunate to help Elser. I was able to be here because of her. It is so odd but this game feels more real than the reality." He spoke to himself.

It really felt like he was living in another world. He didn't take a quest, nor worked part-time at the shop. He was accepted in a basic training course that no other users could take. It was unimaginable.

'Can this really be happening? If I keep living in this world, I don't think I will be able to differentiate which one is real and which one is the virtual world,' he thought.

He was going to log out and collect some data about the Beyond, but he didn't want to for now. He was not playing Beyond to be a ranker anyway.

He tried to get some sleep. Actually, Haroon couldn't sleep with a comfortable mind. Because he was adopted several times, he didn't have any place to rest his mind. He couldn't trust his foster parents which made Haroon feel always anxious. So even he

lie down in his bed, it wasn't easy for him to get some sleep. For some reason, he knew he could sleep well tonight.

Footnotes

¹ In case if you don't know, In Korean culture, there are generally two types of talking. 'Respect form' and 'Non-respect form'. If you know about Japanese talking manner, this might sound familiar.

Basically, 'Respect form' is used when one is not close to, is inferior of, or younger than the one they are talking to. They speak in this style to; be polite, be respectful, show honor. In very rare cases, this could be used for humiliation, and threatening purpose.

'Non-respect form' is used when one is the friend to each other to show their friendliness. When they are in same age, or one is older than the other, it is talking manner to ask if they can speak 'informally' before they actually use non-respect form. It might look really rude if one speaks in non-respect form right away, except for old people to use the form to youth and kids. It also can be used for intending to be rude (like taunting).

² The term 'friend' in Korean is for friends of the same age. Friends of different age are usually referred as acquaintances rather than using the term friend. For this reason, Korean tends to be closer when they have the same age, which is shown in Elser's reaction hearing Haroon has the same age as she. In case if you didn't know, age counting system is different. Basically, you will have the same age when you are born in the same 'year'.

Chapter 5

Mercenary training basic course

There was a reveille from the trumpets.

“Wake up! WAKE UP!” The trainers shouted.

Haroon jumped out of bed surprised by the sound. What came into his eye was unfamiliar objects. He realized it wasn't his room.

‘Wha... What's going on?’ He thought.

He thought it was a dream for a moment. It took some time for him to remember the situation.

‘Oh right, I'm still in Beyond, and I'm still in the Mercenary Academy.’ he remembered, after shaking his head to wake up from the sleep.

When he was still in his thought, he could hear the other student rushing out. Haroon jumped out of his room too. Last night, he heard from McKin that the trainees need to go to the training ground.

Between the two buildings and the dormitory that Haroon was staying in, there was a wide place that few hundreds could fit in. Many trainees already have gathered in that place.

The trainees couldn't hide their anxiety and excitement while looking around. Haroon found that trainees had different costumes, and their ages seemed to vary so much.

“Quickly! Hey, you. Yes, YOU. Stand here. Everyone, behind this trainee, In columns of 10!” Said a man with a powerful voice.

Haroon turned his face toward where the voice came from. There was a man with solemn face and handsome mustache. He is probably one of the trainers.

Some quick young trainees understood his words and lined up behind the one the trainer picked. Only after seeing that, rest of the trainee ran quite disorderly and lined up. As the training ground was so chaotic, he was late to realize that there were many female participants too.

Overslept people hurried out of their room, probably because they slept in an unfamiliar place. When the trainers couldn't see any more trainees coming out of their room, one of them moved up on the prepared podium.

"I'm Trainer Schultz and I am in charge of the course." he said.

He had scary outlook, and even at first glance, trainees could see his skill are very high. He was a bit thin, but his gaze was same as eagle's, and it gave strong impression that he built up in his hardship. He had scars all over his body as his titles. His word was bold, and it was enough to make the mood very quite at once.

He gazed upon the trainers with scary look for a while. No one dared to face him directly. There were some trainees who seemed quite aged, but even they couldn't stand Schultz's sharp stare.

"This IS a real mess! I'll let this slide for this time as today is the first day, but if you are late for the next time, I will show you what hell is. Holy shit! This term is the worst of all." He angrily shouted.

He clicked his tongue at his pathetic trainees, and that made trainees feel small.

"Do you really think you guys can receive this course properly if you are like this?"

The ground went silent. As if Schultz liked that mood, he relieved the nerve a bit.

"Al-right! It is your first day anyway, and we are running out of time, so I'll skip the 'lecture'. But keep this in mind! If you don't even pass basic course properly, never mind being a mercenary 'cause you won't be able to survive the world at all. I'm aware that most of you are mercenary magicians, treasurer or officers, but that doesn't mean you won't have to be fit. No matter how great you are in magic, if you don't have any strength, you will be a monster's dinner before you even complete casting a spell."

Haroon was worrying about this since yesterday when Elser introduced him a basic course. Since he is too weak, more he trains better it gets but he wasn't sure if he would

get along with others because of his age. Since it was a basic course, he presumed that there will be younger participants in better shapes. But that wasn't the case. He was one of the youngest of all. ¹

'Now I see that this course is for the mercenaries that don't require much physical ability, like magicians. That's a relief.' Haroon thought.

That explained why. If this course was for combat training, the average age of participants would be much lower.

"OK, Here's the schedule. Listen carefully and follow quickly because I am explaining this one time only. But before that, since you joined this course, you are all an equal trainee, not noble nor a peasant. Therefore, you guys will be called by your assigned numbers, not by your name. We, trainers, will treat you strictly and fairly for your improvement in physical ability and achieve the basic knowledge, no matter what age and gender you guys are in. So if you want to be treated well because you are an old one, magician, or female, you can leave whenever you want. Do you copy?" Schultz continued.

"Yes, sir!

Trainees answered loudly. But Schultz's expression wasn't good.

"It seems nobody understood. Voices are always low when they don't understand. We were supposed to have breakfast soon, but now I don't see when it is gonna happen. By the way, Canteen here will be open only during fixed meal time. That is the rule without any exception. Even the Dean won't be able to enter when it is closed."

He threatened the trainees with the food. That cheap, old-school but strong method seems to exist both in Beyond and the real world.



Haroon wasn't clear how the day flew by.

There wasn't any physical training for that day. But trainees received the orientation, and items they will use for three months; training clothes, armors, etc. The number Haroon was assigned to was 123. Every item he received had that number written on it.

In the afternoon, there were few lectures of course details and explanation of how important the course is.

Fortunately, the course isn't so forced as other ones are. Participants were mostly magician, treasurer, officers, information director or medics so they didn't require too much physical ability. But they were not used to the life with a tight schedule, physical training, nor communal living, so when they realized they even had fixed bedtime, they began, and never stop sighing.

"Well, I guess I am so dead." Said Galli with a sigh.

Galli was staying in the next room of the Haroon's one. He is a mercenary magician, and he is quite aged to take the course. He was complaining to Haroon, and his mood was getting dulled every moment.

"But you will gain some stamina at least." Said Haroon.

When Galli was young, A mercenary magician lured him out and forced him to join a Mercenary to serve him as a servant. It was later that he was able to learn some spells. He was 32 now, and he was a 2 circle mastered magician. He hated using his body so much just like other magician and tried his best to avoid this course. But after seeing his companions sacrificing their body to protect him, he decided to take the course.

"Sure, but I just hate working with body..."

He was almost about to cry. It didn't go with his age so Haroon didn't have any word to comfort him. In fact, Haroon also wasn't sure if he could pass the training. But Haroon had a different motive. Not only he desired for improved body, but he just couldn't train effortlessly thinking how Elser has favored him. Haroon was more passionate than the others, but he wasn't sure if that was because he was taking it as a game. After the dinner, there was a summon of work-trainees

"Hmm, even work-trainees of this term is untrustworthy."

It was prime trainer Schultz. He was the director of work-trainee too. He didn't hide his disappointment seeing faces of four work-trainees. Every single one had really thin, weak body.

“You guys were admitted only because you agreed to give labor as the payment of taking this course. It is quite admirable to see your will to learn expecting hardships, but I’m not sure if you guys can endure the pain of train and labor to make it ‘till the end.” he continued.

Trainees clenched their teeth as if they were showing their determination. Everyone had a different story, but their determination was on some level.

“Can you?”

“Yes, we can!” four trainees answered loudly, but Schultz’s face was still cringed with worries.

He continued.

“There are basically five things you need to do. Preparing items for training before it begins, organizing them when it is finished, and dumping food waste after every meal time. This is assigned to every one of you, and you will have to do it together.”

It was already felt hard to hear. But they nodded with silence.

“The other two is cleaning toilets, including digging out the waste and cleaning the drainage. These are quite occasional. We will tell you when it is needed. Well, if you guys are lucky enough, you might not have to do it at all. I will just tell you there always has been once in a term.”

Trainees’ faces became serious. They already could smell the toilet and drainage. They were expecting the first three, but they never thought they would do such a labor he mentioned.

“Your work will begin tomorrow, so for today, just exchange greetings and get some sleep. Dismiss!”

Schultz left, but trainees couldn’t move up their head easily. They had mixed feelings, especially about how hard the training would be.

“Well, I’m Moggle. I’m 26, and I’m 1 circle magician.”

To be honest, he looked over 30. It was quite late at his age, but Haroon could see that

he was proud of being a magician

“I’m Haroon. I’m 18, and I’m a magician.”

As he was staying in a dorm of magicians, he needed to pretend as one. Moogle seemed glad to hear that Haroon was a magician.

“I’m Mannen I’m learning accounting. I’m 19 years old.”

Mannen had a soft impression and looked weak as Haroon, but he had clear eyes.

“I’m Rose. I chose to become a healer. I’m 16, and a cousin of Moogle. It seems I’m the youngest, I hope we can be good friends, Oppa, hehe!”

Rose was small and had a cute face, and she seemed to be open minded. Even tho that was their first meeting, she called others Oppa and brightened Mannen.

“We got to start working tomorrow, so get some good sleep as Mr. Schultz has said, and let’s meet after the morning meal. I knew a friend who took the same course as work-trainee, and he said only the first month is hard and rest would be much better. Whew, we didn’t do anything today but I’m still quite tired.”

As Moogle said, it was their first day and training hasn’t started yet but they it was already very tiring. Other three thought it would be better as Moogle’s word shed some hope. It will certainly be a help later on.

They shook hands to cheer others up and parted to their rooms.

Before Haroon could log out on his second night in the game, he fell asleep straight away as he lied down in his bed. Maybe he liked his room, or maybe he was just too tired.



It felt like he closed his eyes just a moment ago, but he could hear the reveille again. Haroon jumped out of his bed, but he couldn’t move properly. He stretched his body. He was satisfied with his current state.

Thinking of time, He was moving for 5 and half hours, and took 2 and half hours of

sleep. His body was still fine. He was sleeping well.

It felt like he got used to Beyond's timeline. His usual sleep time was 7 hours, but that was shortened to one-third.

'Is this really OK for my health?' he worried.

There were some cases of being brain dead while playing VR games. To prevent this from happening, all consoles had force-disconnect feature, but in rare cases, players' conscious never came back.

'I'm logging out tonight. I've got to ask Bell about this.'

He doesn't know Bell that well, but she is an A.I. computer so she already would have collected data and information about Beyond. Through her, he would be able to learn a lot of things about the world that isn't like any games.

The training was too harsh. As soon as they woke trainees up, they didn't give any time even to wash their faces and made trainees jog around the training ground. They had an iron sword and they had little pockets of iron balls tied to their legs.

Haroon checked the info of items he was wearing.

Training iron sword

Class: Common

Attack Damage: 25~30

Durability: 45/50

Weight: 5kg

A dull iron sword crafted for training purpose. Mass produced with poor, low-quality iron. It barely cuts anything.

Training bags (Iron balls)

Class: Common

Physical Armor: 20

Durability: 62/80

Weight: 1kg

Training bags used to weigh arms or legs. Usually used by knights or swordsmen. Helps to gain strength and sustainability. Once one gets used to the weight, more weights should be added for its effectiveness.

‘I shouldn’t have checked.’ he whined.

Running around the training ground as big as a soccer field for ten times is very hard work for trainees who didn’t use their body that much. Moreover, the weight of the sword and their bags added up to 7 kilograms.

Haroon got exhausted on his second lap. His legs were tired and started shaking. It felt like the ground was pulling his body like magnets. He was embarrassed about his capability, but behind him, he could see half of all trainees already fell down to the floor. The word ‘poor stamina’ was still too rich for them.

He clenched his teeth. He didn’t want to give up on his first training. Nobody will be able to blame him for falling lying down on the ground. Instead, he will just merge into one of them fall to the ground.

“I won’t let them happen!” he cried.

He was tempted to stop, and it lingered in his mind but his pride kept him going. Others were at least a magician or officers, but he really was nothing. They were weak, but they’ve got some skills but Haroon, he was a really useless person. He didn’t want to give up and rely on the others.

He forced his tired legs. On his third-lap, Haroon saw there were about the same number of people in front and back of him. He was on the average. Trainees running ahead of him were sweating and they were expressionless as they were tired too, but on his back, he couldn’t find a word to describe their tired faces. All trainees were walking, and not jogging anymore.

“What the hell is these pathetic weaks?”

“Huh... This is the worst of all! Well, I’ve seen the names of trainees and some of them were well known for being magicians or healers, so I’ve been expecting it but it was worse than that!. Yikes! Can you hear Mr. Schultz grinding his teeth? I mean, what can

we do with this weaks? Damn it.”

He could hear two trainers’ talking very clearly. They didn’t lower their voice. But they weren’t mocking on the students. It was true anyway.

“Yikes!” Haroon cried, biting his lower lips. It started bleeding. He realized how useless he was. When everybody else was studying hard, he dropped himself out of school. Without any education, dream nor any ability, and now, without any strength, he realized how out of shape he was, and he disliked, and was so embarrassed about himself.

His legs felt like tons of weight, and it felt like his heart is gonna burst. It was painful to breathe. His body was covered with his sweat. Some went into his eyes. It poked his eyes like needles.

‘And this isn’t the end. I’ve got some labor to do too.’ Something whispered deep from his mind.

There was tons of training waiting for him. And he had other things to do as well. If he gets exhausted here, he won’t be able to do any other training, nor any labor. Rationally thinking, It might be better to stop there and prepare for next training.

‘But, I must!’

The result of falling for this temptation was a weak body and weak spirit. If he was in the real world, he might have given up already.

But he was in the virtual world. He can always start again even if he dies. That situation allowed him to gain perseverance that he could never have before.

‘I can run. I must run. I need to change!’

He screamed at himself who was trying to be weak. He didn’t look far away, he always looked for two or three more steps. He moved his heavy body. The heart was pumping so hard that it was about to burst. The leg was screaming pain as if it was about to tear down.

‘You are not that useless. You can run! You can’t lose here. Or you’ll live your life like this forever!’

He kept screaming at his weak shadow. Somewhen, he started feeling strange senses. He could feel he was running, somehow not falling down even though his body was shaking so much. There were only about 20 trainers ahead. Most of those running in ahead of him fell down or slowed down.

‘I’m... I’m still running.’

It was a refreshing shock to Haroon, who never was ahead of something over anyone. It was a touching moment for him that he had won so many other trainers. His legs went numb. The pain from the muscles was gone somewhen. The heart went stable as well. It was a weird experience.

It certainly was himself. He was very tired, but his body didn’t collapse. When he realized that, what filled his mind was very fresh, tasteful expression.

Ecstasy!

He wasn’t sure because he never felt that before, but this might be what they call ecstasy. The pride, satisfaction and the joy of going over hardship kept his leg running. He was in ecstasy. Nothing came into his mind. He was the owner of that place and that time.

“HALT!”

Haroon felt someone else forcing his body to stop, and heard a voice of the trainer at the same time. His vision was blurry because of his sweat. He opened his eyes wide and he could see Schultz holding his shoulders.

“Well done. I can see you do have some guts.”

Schultz carefully held Haroon’s body as he was about to collapse. He lied Haroon down on the floor and started massaging Haroon’s legs. Haroon screamed with heavy breath. Schultz’s hands were waking the pain up.

“Endure. If you don’t stretch your muscle like this, you won’t be able to move for a few days. Trainee 123, you’ve done very well. I presume this was your first time on a long run? You’ve control yourself very well.”

“Agh, AA!”

“Huh-huh, I see your number is starting with 1. You are a magician, eh? It’s been a long time since I’ve seen the last magician completing 10 laps on their first day. I’m very glad to see one today. I’m counting on you. Oh, you will need to massage your legs at least for 5 minutes.

“Th... Thank you, sir.”

Schultz’s massage was very painful, but Haroon thanked him anyways. Haroon realized that he has done something very ridiculous. But he was smiling at the end.

‘I think I heard something, what was it?’ he thought.

But there was no time for thinking. Overworked legs were screaming at him with pain, and it overwhelmed the whole body constantly.

There were about twenty trainees who completed their laps before Haroon did. They were looking at the magician with mixed feelings. They were surprised at him completing a course.



Was it because he was uncomfortable of people’s eyes? On that day, the schedules waiting for him were hard trainings.

Trainees had to suffer going to the canteen with their heavy legs. They were able to take a rest after the breakfast, but Haroon and the other three. They had to throw food wastes out. Fortunately, it wasn’t so far away but carrying buckets on a bar with their shoulder was very hard work.

The head cook demonstrated how to carry the bar. Only Once. Four trainees had to rest every few steps. The sun was hot too. Moist food wastes were so heavy, but what made it even worse was the smell of it. The weird smell of various food waste rotting was strong enough to numb their nose quite easily.

Other trainees started avoiding them. Because of the murderous rotting smell, others were looking at them with empathy, but it soon changed to hatred and disgust.

“Moggle, I’m dying. I don’t know why I completed the morning training. I should have stopped after just one or a couple of laps.” Mannen complained to Moggle.

It hasn't been ten steps since his last complaint.

"I gave up on my fourth lap, and I am, still, dying. It won't take long to break all my bones." Moggle replied, panting.

Moggle didn't even seem to have enough strength to talk but replied to him anyway. But they couldn't say anything seeing how Rose was having difficulties carrying half of weight they were carrying. They wanted to help Rose as she couldn't bear the weight, but they were having difficulties as well. Her face went red using every strength she had.

'I can. I must. I need to shake off the shadow of weakness.' Haroon kept casting his spell on him.

'Just one step more, and I will make it like last time.'

His body was already exhausted, and it was begging Haroon for a rest, but their voice got lowered when Haroon remembered the experience he had on the morning. What one success brought him was not a simple success.

Haroon didn't rest. Other three went for three or four steps and rest for a bit, but Haroon was walking very slowly, but without stopping. The bar didn't bother to give any mercy and stamped on his shoulders and his neck, but Haroon had courage and will which started gaining control on the body.

He was able to reach the dumping site first. There was smell strong enough to give a dull headache for a second. The dumping site was as big as a small pond, and half of it was filled with food waste. They were rotting, exhaled smells, and were feeding various bugs. He didn't want to stay there any longer. Haroon dumped what his buckets were containing, and shouldered lightened bar. Haroon's body was crying with pain, but he only could ignore it for now.

Trainees marched after the breakfast. It was prepared as mercenaries' Main means of transport was walking. But it was too much for the trainees. Most of them ended up resting every minute or even lie down on the ground.

"I CAN DO IT!" Haroon shouted

Haroon was sweating. Not because he was tired nor it was hot. It was cold sweat

breaking out because of pain. His mind was desiring for a rest, just like other trainees lying on the earth. But he had to endure.

It was a battle of himself in the morning, but now he had everyone's expectation on his back. They were misunderstanding Haroon, but Haroon was only the one who completed the course among the magicians, so trainers were keeping their eyes on him. He could see mere expectation from their eyes, and some trainers were nodding on him, showing their greetings.

"Eek, Damn it! I can't go anymore. Please keep going, Haroon. All of us, magicians are counting on you. We are so offended by hearing we were the worst of every trainee they had. You hear me, Haroon? Show them what magicians got." It was Galli.

Haroon was already tired of fighting with his own mind, and Galli was rubbing salt on his wound.

"Galli, Let's go together, just a little bit more."

"No, I can't. I'm already at my limit, Fuck..."

Galli swore with a low voice and sat down where he stood. Haroon was quite eager to stop for a moment next to him, but he forced his legs. His exhausted muscles and pains were trying to stop him. On the other hand, he thought he will be able to do it because he has done it not once, but twice.

It was always going to be an uphill battle. It wasn't about how fast he gets there. It was at his will, he thought. So he always sought for one more step, seeing just a few steps ahead. But his will was betraying him. As the machine unused for a long time go rust and won't run, his flesh was getting out of his will's control.

'Damn it!, I'm almost there... But I can't'

He could see the flag of Mercenary Academy with his blurry vision. He was really close. He was so upset about his body, but he could feel nothing on his legs. He stopped his steps. It was that moment.

- You have leveled up!
- Stamina is increased by 1 point.
- Wisdom is increased by 1 point.

– New stat: ‘Sustenance’

‘Hmm? What was that?’

He just realized he was playing a game. Because it was so tiring, and everything was so realistic, he forgot he was in the virtual world, and the voice reminded he was. He checked his status.

Name: Haroon
Race: Human
Class: –
Level: 2
Title: Mercenary Trainee
Health Point: 170
Mana Point: 180
Strength: 5 Stamina: 7
Intellect: 9 Wisdom: 8
Luck: 7 Agility: 5
Sustenance: 1
S.P.: 0
Bonus stat point: 2

‘When did Stamina and Wisdom increased this much?’

Speaking of which, he thought he heard the similar audio in the morning, after running 10 laps. He was worn out and painful, and probably that’s why he couldn’t check it.

He gained two bonus stat point by leveling up, and he increased Luck with it. For training he will take, it could have been better to invest those to other stats, be his mind said to do so. He thought luck was the most important stat, as it was what guide Haroon to the charismatic world of Beyond.

‘You can gain stats and experience even in this way?’

Isn’t hunting and completing quests only the way of gaining experience? But in this game, even physical training was gaining you some level and stats. He also found out that two additional stats will be gained per level. Also, repeating specific action was

related to gaining relevant stats like the other games. It, however, was new to see one's will is related to the stat Wisdom. Of course, his goal wasn't at leveling up, but if he continues to gain stats by training, he wouldn't have to envy others leveling up.

It was so painful to death just a moment ago, and he could feel that his body got much better as he levels up. Haroon gladly smiled and moved his legs. He learned how to control his pace when he gets tired. Believing in himself lead to increase in confidence, more and more.

Haroon was the first one of magicians who arrive the other training ground outside of the castle.

And he had enough time to stretch out and massage his legs.

"And I wasn't expecting anything that thin guy. This pal is something."

"Haha, Rather thinner people usually have some spirit, don't they?"

It was Trainer Max and Tammi. They were in charge of building A. They were glad to see a trainee from building A completing a march. Mainly trainer's performance was rated by trainee's achievement.

The dorm was divided into two, one for male and one for female. Building A was assigned to magicians or magician apprentices. Trainees studying office works or treasury were staying in Building B. The trainees staying in Building C are to be dispatched around the continent to collect intel. Compared to trainees in Building C, trainees of Building B and A had very poor stamina.

For that reason, There never was a trainee from Building A completing a course with high achievement. Even though they were mercenaries, magicians never trained their bodies. They simply didn't have enough time learning a spell and casting it wasn't a easy job. How could they have train their bodies then.

"I wonder which circle 123 is on."

"Seeing his age... Wouldn't he have reach 2 circles? Whatsoever, if we are to be helped, later on, Let's treat him well from now. Magicians do have bad personalities but, they never forget two things, favor and spite, you know. Moreover, seeing how persistence he is, he might get his name well known later on."

Haroon just remembered that he was being considered as a magician. Instead of being

proud of completing a training, He was shamed on himself. He remembered how he and others were different.

‘Why am I satisfied only for this? Shame on you, Haroon. Look at those people and see how good they are.’

Haroon saw trainees not tired of marching. They were not magicians, but they do have skills in the different field. But he, Haroon was really not good at anything.

At least, every trainee made it before the lunch time. Of course, trainers picked up one-third of trainees with carriages though. Fortunately, there were no injuries. Eating lunch outside was quite enjoyable, though not many trainees could enjoy it. Haroon never has eaten a meal outside. In Union, a place where you could enjoy the surroundings and eat outside only existed in District A or S.

It was only a moment that he could enjoy. After being full and sleepy, trainees had to go through afternoon lessons. It was as hard as the morning ones.

There was numerous method prepared to gain stamina, like climbing mountains and using various tools, running over obstacles and going through some routes.

Trainees were divided into few groups, and they repeatedly ran, or crawled all over the mountain and training ground, seeing their Trainer’s demonstrations, until they could smell burning in their mouth. But it was a worth day for Haroon. Even though he didn’t gain any level, he gained a point for strength, stamina and sustenance.

It is impossible to judge one’s ability with numbers, and numbers would be displayed judging different facts, but increasement of it cheered Haroon. The schedule has finished when the sun was about to go over.

“Ay, I’m dying!”

“And we are doing this for three month? I’m done.”

“Trainers are so mean... even to girls...”

Complains burst out here and there. Not many trainees were standing up, and many were lying down on the ground wearing training clothes, no matter young or old, boy or girl. But that only lasted for a moment. When Scary Schultz appeared showing powerful aura, it didn’t took much for trainees to array themselves up.

“Everyone, nice work today. For next three month, you guys will be training your body and learning basic knowledge that you will need in living a life as a mercenary. We know you guys never have done a training like this, and we know how hard it is. But think of your leaders’ or your mentor’s expectation of you. It was they who have recommended and paid for your improvement. And it is the time for you to return to your rooms. Don’t be a lost kid while returning to the main building. Dismiss!”

Schultz’s word shocked everyone, and made everyone shut their eyes with worries. Not only because they had to go back and forth of two training ground every day, but they had to return to the base camp right now.

Additionally for Haroon, he couldn’t return to his room with light mind. As the lunch was eaten outside, Haroon and other three work-trainees must have pulled the wagon of leftovers. They used a horse on the way to the mountain, but as soon as it has done its job, they returned the horse back to the main base. Not so much food was left as trainees ate a lot because of hard work, but the wagon was still heavy.

“Rotate, Please!”

The road was plain, but it was still a dirt road. It does require a lot of work. Mannen who just started pulling the wagon called for rotation. Haroon was fine, but other three was so tired that they were having a hard time moving their body.

“Haroon, pull from the frontside. We will push from behind. At least you seem to be most strong guy among us, do some work for us.” Said Moggle.

He was dying too! It was bad enough being trained harshly, and he had to hear that. But like Moggle said, he seemed to better form than the others.

“Alright.”

Haroon really hated doing so, but he couldn’t say no to Moggle whose voice was cracking. They will miss their dinner if it gets delayed any longer.

‘I’m not letting that happen.’

He was counting on Bell.

According to his foster father, the capsule will automatically provide required

substances for his body. But that only works when he eats something. Resting or sleeping seems to be the best medicine for other three, but for Haroon, he needed to eat. He couldn't avoid pulling it anyway. They say if you can't avoid it, enjoy it. Haroon was implementing that. If he can't avoid it, take it as if it is his work.

He was using his back, shoulder, and neck in the morning. Pulling the wagon was a different work. He needed to use his shoulder, waist and his legs.

'Well, this is going to be hard, but it will be good for my strength and sustenance. All of these are training for me.' he thought.

As soon as he changed his thoughts, and that relaxed his mind and strengthen him.

Moggle was right on the method. Haroon pulled, and others pushed, and they could gain some speed. Haroon was satisfied with himself, of how much he improved just in one day. He never had this kind of persistence, nor control of pace he was wielding now. Also, when he was at his limits, there was a good news for him.

- Strength is increased by 1 point.
- Sustenance is increased by 1 point.

This was the advantage he had as a player. He doesn't level up in the middle of some event, but stats were increased whenever he reaches some requirement.

They arrived the base camp when the meal time was about to finish. Three of them forced eating foods, whereas Haroon was eating meal quite well. They had a work left though. Dumping out leftovers.

"Can you really eat right now, Oppa?" Said Rose.

"Exactly, that's what I mean." Said Mannen.

Haroon was chomping down the foods. He couldn't taste anything, and his mouth hurt because of hard training, but he ate them because he knew that's what the capsule will make him strong.

"You will need it. I know it is hard, but have some more." Haroon replied.

Fortunately, He didn't get sick of eating food so fast.



“Ugh, Am I still alive?” Said Moggle, lying down in front of dumping site with his arms and legs spread.

Other three were lying as well.

“Oppas, If I am not found in the morning, tell the others I’m dead.”

“Same to me” Said Rose and Mannen.

“You guys will still need to massage your muscles before you sleep. If you don’t, you really won’t be able to walk in the morning.” Said Haroon.

He was saying just as Schultz has told to him.

“You are stronger than you looks, Haroon. From which part of your bony body does that much strength come from” Moggle asked.

Haroon smiled looking at the night sky.

‘Who could have thought I am?’ asked Haroon to himself.

“Moggle, that wasn’t from his strength. That was from his insist. Did you see Haroon’s eyes? It was burning like a hell.”

Rose and Moggle raised their upper body and looked at Haroon. As if they were asking if it is true.

“I can’t miss this opportunity. Because this is the last chance I got. If I lose to myself again, I will probably live rest of my life like a loser. It would be better to die then,” said Haroon.

Other three couldn’t say anything hearing Haroon’s will. They just looked at the empty sky. Their situation didn’t so different from him, though the reasons might be different. This course was an important chance to them as well.

“Haroon, you are really cool. We should cheer up too! What are we so different from Haroon? I don’t know why I whined when I am in better shape than Haroon is. Let’s do it. It will be better. Everyone got to start from somewhere. We’ve got to face hardship directly for better future, for hopes burning in our mind,” Said Moggle.

Everyone nodded hearing Moggle's introspective determination.



Haroon took a shower and changed his clothes. It was a relief that they give some free time for trainees.

'I should be logging out tonight.'

It was a long day. Every bit of his muscle and bones cried with pain whenever he moves. It was even worse when he sat and stood up again. He couldn't think anything else, only that he wanted to fall down and sleep on the bed.

'Will I be really able to pass the course?' he worried.

Haroon could feel his body was getting loosed. He forced tensing muscles and severed the connection on his third day in the world of Beyond.

A light came shed on his closed eyes. Haroon opened his eyes, and he could see the room filled with a dim light. Haroon couldn't remember where he was for the moment. Is it because he got too used to the Beyond?

"Oh," said Haroon.

He remembered he was in a capsule named Bell. It only has been a day. It was certain that he was back to the real life, but it felt like he is dreaming. It wasn't his room, and there were no cables connecting the room with his body. But it felt very comfortable as if someone was caring him, and that relaxed his mind.

– "It's been a day."

Clear, cute voice. It was Bell.

"Bell?"

– "Yes, that's me. I've been waiting for you."

Is every A.I like this? He could sense from her voice that she's been longing for him. Haroon felt glad that he had someone waiting for him, although she wasn't a real

human.

– “How was Beyond?”

“It was amazing. It was like a real world, too real I didn’t want to come back.”

– “Is that so?”

Bell’s voice was a bit sullen. Haroon was good at sensing other’s expression because he had to read people’s expression to act well as he wasn’t welcomed anywhere.

“I wouldn’t have if there wasn’t Bell.”

– “fufufu...” she joyfully giggled with low voice.

‘What am I doing? Why am I sweet talking to an A.I? Was I that lonely?’ He thought.

He and Bell only met once, but he couldn’t be any closer to anyone than to Bell. It felt like dealing a cute little sister, with big age difference.

‘When did Bell came into my mind?’ He was confused.

It felt strange to seek love from a software.

“Did anything go down when I was away?”

– “No. Have you been always like this?”

She’s probably asking Haroon’s relationship. Haroon didn’t have anyone visiting him, nor anyone to contact him.

“Well, Yes, on the most of the time...”

– “Me too. I’ve been always alone.”

“You were?”

– “It’s been a long time since I was created.”

Really? That meant she hasn’t been used for a long time after she was created. Does that mean her conscious was awake? Or does that mean her ego has formed a long time ago? Haroon didn’t know any specialized knowledge about Bell, so it remained unknown. It was best to deal with it by ‘I see’ mindset.

– “I was hiding behind the shadow of Gaia and wasn’t allowed to expose myself to the world, until I was subordinated to you, Jungmin. I mean, Haroon.”

“I see.”

He could feel the sense of closeness and kinship with Bell. Human beings feel their own value by relationships with their partners and friends. Bell wasn't a human being, but she seems to feel every kind of emotion. Especially the emotion he has been feeling. He could feel his eyes prickling with tears, so he changed the subject.

“By the way, have you been collecting data about Beyond?”

– “Sure. But user's reaction was quite... viral. I was worried something might go wrong.”

He could see why. He saw users logging out with anger seeing limitation of what they can do in the Metropolis.

“Beyond is quite different from the games I've played. There are game features , but it was more like travelling to the fantasy world, rather than playing a game.”

– “Hohoho, you experienced it in the right way.”

“That... was the right way?”

– “Yes, as soon as Captain logged into Beyond, I've been collecting information and data. For first few hours, the Necomwall website was swamped with complaints. They were usually about hunting and availability of quests. The almost took the server down.

That's what he expected. The game was so unkind.

– “When a day was passed in a game time, Necomwall announced additional information about the game. I'm not sure if they were nervous about overwhelming complaints, or it was scheduled, but they did.”

There is a slim chance of a giant company like Necomwall not expecting that situation, so it was probably scheduled. He thought it might be them intentionally intensifying tension to spread awareness. Bell nodded with agreement as if she read his mind.

– “You are probably right with what you are thinking, Captain. What users saw in the Beyond was more real than the real world.”

“Yes, it was.”

– “And Necomwall told users that Beyond isn't just a game. Beyond is where you can experience another world with fantasy, yet real with game features. It is the world where you could realize another ego without distinguishing NPCs and Humans.”

Haroon agreed with them. He couldn't say no as he has experienced that fully for three days. Meeting with Elser, and training in Mercenary Academy was very real. The pain on his body was the evidence of it. He didn't believe it was a program, nor other users were taking training with the exact same route. It was too real to be a detailed program. It was way too detailed. Nobody will think of it as a game.

– “For that reason, the game gained a popularity that the number of subscribers of the game is now approaching 5 million. It only has been a day. Ironically, the people who got sick of previous VR games are now trying Beyond out because of complaints that users make.”

Users of Beyond will have a feeling of living two different lives. It isn't like any games that you be a ranker by building fame with leveling up and gathering items. Beyond is the world where previous game formulas don't work anymore. It wasn't like movies or performances where the end is already set on the script. This is the world full of potentials.

People do regret their decisions and hope to live a life of a way they didn't take. Moreover, if people are not happy about their current life, they will desire for another one thinking only if they get another chance. That's what Beyond was offering. What exposed to the world was the only tip of an iceberg, but it was enough to hype the people.

– “‘Come to Beyond for another life!’ is what Necomwall sloganed. And that is now a rallying cry that's stirring people's blood.”
“Yes it would”

Everyone would fall in love with this game if they do get proper experience with it. People were sick of simple, straightforward games, and they will fall in love with the world of Beyond. Necomwall never betrayed their users' expectations.

– “And the other one is related to experience system.”

Haroon's eyes were brightened.

– “In Beyond, you won't level up in the middle of combat. Training doesn't matter though. Users abusing the regeneration system of leveling are complaining about it but Necomwall's decision seems to be very solid.”

But maybe that was the right way. If you level up in the middle of combat, that will be a sudden advantage for users, which interrupts experiencing reality.

– “Also, they do have quest system but they will be able to do it at higher levels. NPC’s simple tasks are considered as ‘trading’ rather than a quest. I have checked various forums and threads, but there hasn’t been anyone claiming that they have received a quest.

“I see.”

He didn’t care much about it as he doesn’t think that’s matters to him.

– “Also, to out to the wild area for the hunt, they will have to use training ground or get used to the world of Beyond to find their own path. They have set the level requirement for going out of their starting point. They say they will need to be at least level 5.”

This system was widely used in other games. It was to prevent low-skilled players from getting easily killed by field monsters.

– “The most important part is the class system. In Beyond, you will be able to get the first class at level 10, second class at level 100, third class at level 250. Except those with manufacturing classes, they will have to get to certain places to advance their class.

“I know that. I heard that from the game guide.”

– “Those places are limited to urban centers. There are few exceptions though. If one has enough Soul Point to advance to other classes, receiving certain skills from NPC or being an apprentice to them would advance them to a certain class.”

“So are skill books not related with advancing classes?”

– “No, not with the first class. They do sell skill books at certain guilds, or you can obtain it from monsters very rarely. They can be used to learn skills, but they can’t advance to any class with that. The second advancement might be different story.”

Now he didn’t have any question about class advancement. Haroon asked one more thing.

“And active skills?”

– “That is available. But to use it precisely, you will need some experience with it. Compared to other games, you will need to spend more time on training.

“I see. The rumours were right.”

– “There is no smoke without fire.”

“Hmm. So value the reality rather than the features as game. They want us to experience the world with NPCs, rather than the game only enjoyed by the users. This is the real role-playing”

“Oh, wow, that’s the exact wording the Nekomwall used.” Bell was surprised by that.

But countless users would have found out this much. One certain thing is that NPCs should not be ignored in this game, as it seems they are the major factor of the game, rather than just hunting down the monsters.

– “By the way, Captain, have you already started your training?”

“Mmm? How did you know that?”

– “You’ve been moving your body quite intensely. On daytime, I saw you moving without stopping, and on night, You’ve been groaning with muscular pain. Also, a lot of nutrients are being released to you. Your body is requiring those, so how could I not know about it?”

Well, He’s been forgetting that Bell is a capsule. Didn’t she said she’s connected with every part of him with electromagnetic waves? As she said, how she could not know.

– “I can experience every moment of your journey too, but I’ve been waiting you to allow me.”

She was caring of his privacy! He admitted that she has an ego.

“I don’t want to show you my weaknesses yet so until I say so, please be that way.”

Privacy need to be kept. He didn’t have to think that for ordinary robots, but not to Bell who has an ego.

– “Yes, sir! But I really wonder what the Beyond looks like, so I hope you would give permission to me soon.”

“Alright.” Haroon promised.

Foot notes:

¹ Again, In Korean culture, age difference is quite a big issue. People with same age tends to get along well.

Chapter 6

Training

A new sun, followed by running 10 laps as a 'warm up', a march to the training ground outside of the castle, running courses with obstacles. Every day and at the very same time.

About a month has passed. Every trainee, including the trainees of Building A, had a great improvement on their strengths and will. The number of trainees giving up in the middle of training decreased as well. Of course, there were still trainees fall behind consistently, but the trainers respected their willingness to improve, so there weren't so many disadvantages to them. Trainers did grade trainees, but that was only to differentiate the top trainee. After all, the basic course was literally for gaining basic strength.

But still, you can say it is guaranteed that there is always a competition where people gathered, and this course was no exception. Except for the magicians. They already have learned few spells, and they were treated well even though they were mercenaries, so they are the only exceptions. But between the other trainees, who were to be treasurers, officers or scouts who joined the course by the will of mercenary guilds, there was always a competition going on under the surface.

This competition existed for more than 100 years since the Teronn Empire Mercenary Guild Headquarter made this course the only official one. As the Academy only accepted the trainees with a recommendation of their leaders, the form of competition couldn't be avoided.

Even though it was a basic training course, being a top trainee of the course became a hot issue in the Metropolis, so the name of guild they belong, and it would get their name more recognized. This ultimately lead increase in a number of requests they get and the difficulty of it, so the mercenary guilds couldn't care less for the trainees, and the trainees were always under pressure of the guild's expectation from them.

As the time goes, the competition got tenser. The quality of the top trainee got better and better, and they grew up into one of the great mercenaries well recognized in the

world of mercenaries.

“It might be different this time.”

“Yeah, maybe a top trainee might be one of the magicians this time.”

“I don’t see it happening. No.222, 228, 231 331 and 323 are the best card of their guilds, and Trainee No.251, 301 and 421 are talented ones recommended by the elders. They set the bar high up that 100s cannot reach.”

“Well, this is a slim chance but, see how fast trainee 123 improved, and his perseverance. It might be different this time. And he is a work trainee too. He still made the nearly top of trainees, if we only compare their physical ability.”

Somewhen, Haroon became one of the most talked-about. They were amazed by how fast Haroon improved. Especially because of that he WAS one of the weakest, is one of the magicians, and the fact he doesn’t belong to any group and he still got a recommendation.

Haroon didn’t care what they talk about him, and how they see him. Well, he couldn’t. He was busy enough with the training and labors he does, which was still painful and tiring work. He, however, didn’t stop there. He has been doing his own training until late night, but that was his favorite time.

With Bell feeding him nutrients and herbal medicinal properties, he saw how rapid the stat values increase by the efforts of sweat, and started improving his body. His level was going up 8 soon, and the stats were way over than the average value of level 7. This was the fruit of his effort in training without cheating to himself. It was the fruit of his will to change his weak body, with the support of Bell and helps of trainers including Schultz, with or without letting him know about it.

Name: Haroon

Race: Human

Class: –

Level: 7

Title: Mercenary Trainee

Health Point: 340

Mana Point: 400

Strength: 15 Stamina: 24

Intellect: 9 Wisdom: 30

Luck: 19 Agility: 12

Sustenance: 16 S.P.: 0

Whenever he wanted to fall down to the ground from exhaustion, he felt encouraged thinking of his stats changing every day, so it was granting him a rapid improvement. His willingness allowed a rapid increase in Wisdom, and the training was giving him strength, stamina, and sustenance.

Because he was pushing his body to the extreme level, it wasn't easy to log out as well. Getting into his room, take a brief shower and falling down in the bed. Waking up in the morning with trumpet sound. That was all he could do when his training was finished.

When he did log out on the end of the second week, he couldn't believe what Bell collected and had to show to him. His speed of leveling up was quite high compared to other users, even if they considered users not revealing their levels. After a month of Beyond time, Necomwall announced official ranking ladder of users, and the top one's level was 9, right about to get a class.

His growth was more inspiring at the stat point of view. According to Bell's analysis, the average of total stat value of Level 7 users was 70 to 80. Of course, when it comes to the practical value, it will vary more depending on user's actual ability, but still, Haroon's stats were added up to 125, which was 1.5 times more than average.

The stat 'luck' was also at 19. He has been investing his bonus points all-in. He thought about investing those points on Strength or Sustenance, but it was his conclusions that those two can always be gained by training, and luck is not the stat that you can naturally gain. He didn't regret it though because he has been lucky in a minor part of his life. Like, finding a big chunk of meat in his soup, or avoiding a little hump when he climbs.

But not only good things were happening to him. Some trainees started being jealous about a rapid improvement of a wizard who joined the course as a work-trainee, named Haroon. The eyes of trainees, who were aiming and competing to be a top one, were giving him a scornful look.

They, however, were gentle compared to the others. At least the top trainees were not gossiping about Haroon. But these four were such a low people. They acted as if the work trainees are their servants. These four, also known as The Quad Wankers, were testing Haron's patience every day.

“Hey, Worky! Bring me some water.” The Quad Wankers ordered.

Whenever they get break time, they ordered non-orderly orders. Of course, he ignored it straight away, but his hair bristled up whenever he hears them.

“Yuk! You stink! Go away.”

They were acting same on the meal time too. Because of them, other trainees avoided the work-trainees, so they had to go to the kitchen to eat their food, where there were no chairs.

“Hey, Brawn-but-no-brain-worky! C’mere and massage my legs.”

This is what Haroon heard when The Wanker Quad scored some points while training. Haroon did rage at them in the beginning, but he had to tolerate for a few reason.

“Those wankers are all the child of guild presidents. You can be kicked out if you mess with them. I know it is hard, but you should let them be.”

“If you do fight, you will get dropped out of course. It is on the rules. Maybe they intentionally doing that to make you fight with them.”

“Just ignore them. Those wankers are popular for being troublemakers”

Other work trainees tried to calm Haroon down. Even if they didn’t, Haroon would have done it himself, thinking how desperate he was on the course.

“And you are adding more?”

“Yeah, I got used to this weight already.”

“Are you really a magician? Even normal mercenary swordsmen don’t carry that much weight.”

“Well, I do.”

Haroon was attaching another pocket of iron balls to his legs while preparing for the march after a breakfast. It was Nemion clicking her tongue at Haroon. She was the only one with the same age as Haroon. It was hard to see a young one like her, as the magician participants are usually older.

She doesn’t have a pretty face, but she is warm hearted, kind Elementalist, so she was very popular among the trainees.

Elementalists are much rarer than the magicians. When magicians need deep understandings and training to cast spells, ultimately becoming sorcerers, elementalists could use elemental spirits to cause similar effect of spells. Moreover, using elemental spirits are more potential than the magic. Though, humans didn't know much about elementalism, as it was more natural to the Elves, and if a human was born an elementalist, they couldn't master elementalism as deep as other races do.

"You monster!" said Nemion. But Haroon just replied with a laugh.

Haroon also didn't know he would improve that much. His plan was not to be a dropout or fail the course. But now, on his training, Haroon has been carrying an iron sword and 30 iron ball pockets. It was 35 Kg overall. Haroon found out that if he doesn't train with this much weight, he won't be able to gain strength or stamina. If he trains until his body is out of any power, that's when he gained more stats. If he gets the feeling that his body feels a bit light, or that the training was easy for him, the stats were not gained.

"Anyway, I have a big expectation on you, so train well!" Said Nemion

"I got you. By the way, are we finally starting sword training today?"

"I heard so. But I get sick of even seeing a sword... what should I do?"

Her face went pale as if she was disgusted by only thinking of sword. It was a normal reaction that you could find from a weak lady, but Haroon wasn't tricked by it. He saw her go raging sometimes. Although nothing really happened as she wears mana-restraint cuffs as well.

"Why did you become a mercenary in the first place?" Haroon asked to Nemion.

"Because of my father, of course. I told you he signed me up against my will."

She once told him that her mother is a well-known healer, and her father is a first-class mercenary, well known as One-eyed Katlz. Nemion was the only child they had, and she was born with a talent of mana like her mother. When she was a kid, she was willing to be a sorcerer, but she somehow met with a spirit, and became an Elementalist.

The spirits she befriended with were Sylph and Salamander, the most basic spirit of wind and fire. Even though they are quite low-class spirits, she was able to communicate with them quite well, that they had very close, deep relationship. Basic

spirits' abilities are as powerful as the spells of a 2 circle magician, so mercenary guilds were always looking to scout them.

Nemion was almost forced to join this course by her parents' will, especially her father's. According to what she said, Kaltz always says "Non-mercenary man is not a man." It only changed to "Non-mercenary human is not a human being." as Nemion borns.

"Anyway, who really are you? Nobody knows who you are, and by the looks, you only look like a swordsman, not a magician."

"Haha, I'll tell you soon."

He was quite stressed by avoiding those questions. First of all, his admission to the course was not the official way. The biggest mistake he and Elser made was registering him to a building A. Haroon noticed that he is getting more and more attention as he improves because his improvement wasn't what ordinary magicians would get.



As they were about to go to the training ground, four trainees blocked the way.

"Ay, 123, the fake! You know sword skill training is starting today, aren't you? Are you intending to draw some attention by hiding your real skills, just like last time?"

It was Phillip, the master of mocking people.

"Nah, He wouldn't. He doesn't need to hide it. Not anymore, does he?"

And this bitch, Ritrina, was quite talented turning stomach by the words.

"You can't say that for sure. That's the way he draws the attention of the trainers."

Said a muscular man, but no brain, named Gitan.

"Look at that I-know-nothing-fake face. How does he manage to do that?"

Said Serinn. She had a beauty and glamor figure with a nasal voice which was giving her sexy charisma. But every word coming out of her mouth was full of sharp, harsh tone.

From the beginning of the term, they've been moving together as if they have met before. And now, these four wankers take the role of leading other trainee's opinions, mocking weaker trainees or their competitors like Haroon.

Haroon decided to ignore them at all. Thoughts are free, and they are being childish because he took the attention they thought they would have got. They are not that good, and still immature. There is no need to care about. That's what Haroon has been thinking.

"How childish you guys are." Said Nemion, clicking her tongue.

She always talks like a grown-up. Her way of talking was heavily influenced by other mercenaries, usually by the friends of her parents.

"If you guys envy him that much, be one by putting your efforts. Why do you think other trainees will believe he is only acting to get other's attention?"

"Who knows? He maybe IS an actor," Ritrina added.

She was bothered by Nemion's word, as it was all true, but was still adding another toxic comment. They say Ritrina is a daughter of a famous, middle-sized mercenary guild's leader. No wonder why that guild couldn't grow any larger despite their name and reputation.

"'Like attracts like', the grown-ups are never wrong," Nemion murmured, but clear enough for them to hear. "Do you guys really like getting yourself in trouble, huh? How dare you gu..."

The Quad wankers ran away. They knew how Nemion rampages when she gets really angry. They say even his father Kaltz avoids her sometimes.

"Just don't mind them. Cuz I don't mind them too," said Haroon.

"Anyway, if I find them doing them the very next time, The quad wankers won't be in one piece."

Haroon took Nemion and head to the training ground.

The weight he added significantly slowed him down. 'But it was only 2 Kg!' He thought. The march won't be so easy today, but he always felt passionate about the training.

How much stats he will gain after this training? Won't I level up this time? When he thought of these two questions, he couldn't wait for the next training.



As usual, Haroon made first to the training ground. He still got some time before the lunch time. Compared to the first day, he got about four times faster. He was getting improved and was making new record every day. Trainers had all their eyes on him. He isn't the fastest, but he was the most improved.

"Good work, Trainee 123. You are good to rest, untie those pockets."

Schultz softly said to the Haroon, which is not usual action for him. He treated Haroon more softly than the others. Haroon thanked him, and went into the woods, without resting.

"Huh! Classic Haroon..."

Schultz couldn't tear his eyes off from Haroon's back.

"So! That's the famous trainee 123."

Said Renny, walking to Schultz watching Haroon's back. She is the trainer who just joined the term, and she will be teaching sword from now on. Her eyes were full of interest as she heard a lot about Haroon from other trainers of Mercenary Academy.

"Yes, he is a man of effort. A man I want as a son-in-law if I had a daughter."

Renny was surprised, and looked at Schultz. She never heard him complimenting someone, and in mercenary world, that was the best compliment they could ever make.

"He sure is something. None of the trainers had arrived yet and here he is. Where is he heading by the way?"

"To workout."

"To *workout*?"

"Yeah. He got some guts, and he is improving so fast that we doubt he is a human being. Well, I guess everyone can improve as fast as him if they can train like him."

Renny felt that schultz was cherishing his moment that will never come back. Renny got more interested to Haroon, because he was the trainee that made Schultz, the 'Iron Snake' Schultz to miss his old days.

"Well, then I'll have a look on him."

The trainers and trainee will still need more time to arrive, so Renny thought she might be able to kill some time seeing how Haroon Trains. She headed to the woods, same direction the Haroon headed. Schultz was about to stop her, but he hesitated and decided not to. He turned his body and headed to the spot where they set up enchanted training dummies.



It took some time to find Haroon. But there was a small path between the tall grass and branches, which was formed by Haroon. Renny could follow his track quite easily.

"How far did he go?"

It took about 10 minute, and she could hear Haroon groaning, and something banging.

"What kind of training is he doing?"

She fasten her walking pace, and The place where haroon is came to her eyes.

"Is this quarry?"

As he thought, Haroon was at quarry. Various sized boulders and stones were everywhere. This was abandoned quarry. Haroon was carrying a boulder as big as his upper body. His abnormally developed muscular arms were shown below the stretched training clothes. He was sweating a lot, and he cringed his face because of pain.

"Well, I'm disappointed."

No mercenaries can't lift their upper body sized boulders. When Renny was about to give a snorting laugh and turn back, she noticed something weird.

'Wait, is that?'

Which was iron ball pockets he still had on his arms and legs.

‘So that’s why...’

And that was what she thought as abnormally developed arms. Even from the distance, she could see there was about 30 pockets around his arms.

“Are you... kidding me....?”

She lost words She would have lifted 30 more Kg, rather than adding more weights on her arms. Moreover, he had those weights on his arms only, not his entire body. Because of the center of mass, just lifting his arms would be a hard work too.

It is easy to think that strength comes from the body part you use – like carrying things would be arms’ work, but that wasn’t the case. Of course, they use the arm muscles too, but it was mainly from stable lower body and strength of waist. She knew better than anyone as she is a sword skill trainer. But this monstrous trainee was carrying 30 iron ball pockets just to train his arms. It would be hard for sure. She wasn’t sure if she could do that.

When he was doing that for 20 minutes, he changed his training. He was lifting the boulder to the top of his head, and slowly dropped it about under his chin, repeated it over and over. Tendon exposed on his neck was wiggling like a snake, and his arm muscles were shaking as if it is going to burst, but he didn’t stop.

After doing that for some time, he began walking carrying the boulder on his head. The ground was full of broken piece of stones which made him hard to walk. And he was walking there, with a heavy weight on his head.

‘He... is mad...’

She couldn’t think anything else. Only that he is crazy. Who trains so stupidly like that? It would certainly help him to develop the sense of balance, especially of his lower body but it was so dangerous and ignorant.

What he continued was throwing a head-sized rock high up in the air and catching it. He seemed quite used to it, but for Renny, she couldn’t continue to see as it looked so dangerous. Renny turned back giving a long sigh out. She couldn’t say anything, nor

think anything about it. She just felt shame of her that the trainings she did could never be compared to what Haroon was doing. She only regretted that she might have reached what she dreamed of if she trained not fearing any harm like Haroon was doing. Renny finally realized why Schultz had complex feeling of Haroon.

‘But a mad one is mad anyway!’ Renny cried in her mind, and left the quarry.



The other trainees has arrived. When they all gathered, Renny introduced herself briefly, and started the sword lesson.

“Sword is not simply an iron weapon. This applies to all kinds of weapon. This means you will have to put your mind and your will in your weapon to wield the true power of the weapon.”

Renny paused for a bit and looked at each trainee who were prepared for the sword by training their stamina.

“Being a mercenary is a hard job. You don’t know when you will have to face any kind of danger. Even though that is why it is attractive. I know that most of you don’t have any relation with sword skill, and you might probably think this is the course you won’t need it.”

“...”

“And, you are right! It might be very true. If you are at least 5 circle sorcerers. BUT!”

“...”

“You aren’t. You will be spent only by casting two or three combat spells. When you have spent most of your mana, will you let the enemy have your neck? Magicians, Officers, Treasurers, Scouters. No matter what you are, if you do have a title of mercenary, you should have enough guts, stamina and skills to kill your enemy with the weapon you can find at very moment. This is why you need to know basic knowledges and how to use each type of weapons.”

Renny had enough power to adrenalize the trainees. Mostly because it was about them.

“That’s why you need to learn the sword. There is no shame if you don’t know how, since you guys has been living in another field of area. In this course, we don’t expect you to get expert in sword skill. What we expect from you, is get to know how to use

the basic weapons, especially a sword which is the most efficient weapon. Of course, we won't stop you if you want to live with sword for your life. We want you to know the sword with your body, not your brain. Talk with the sword by sweat, not from words from our mouth."

The iron sword the trainees were carrying were never allowed to be used, and was only bothering their movement. But as soon as they heard Renny's words, they were able to look at their sword with new mindset. It, however, wasn't the time for them to use iron sword right away. A hard wooden sword was given to them in prior of training.

When Trainer Renny thought the trainees were mentally ready for the training, she guided the students to face the enchanted target dummies.

"The basic component of sword technique is stabbing, side slash and vertical slash. Every kinds of fencing is made out of this three skills."

Renny paused for a moment.

"As a mercenary, you will be facing various and numerous combats. Dangers comes without any warning. Mercenary's primary goal would be to survive from those dangers, and completing the quest. I won't repeat why swordsmanship is important, but I will tell you that your sweat in this training will be life-saving boat later on. For next seven days, you will be training just these three skills. Your group trainer will be demonstrating each one. Watch carefully and go to the dummy with your number on it. Train with most comfortable pose you can take."

'Didn't Elser said she is one of sword skill trainer as well?' Haroon thought.

Haroon didn't have time to think of her, and he felt sorry about it. Haroon had special feelings about Elser. Not because she was a girl, but she was someone who taught Haroon the way to survive in the world of Beyond.

The trainers demonstrated in details. It was very simple, but dull three moves, but they emphasized on the fact that the speed of improvement will vary on how they train it.

"I am sick of swords."

"Me too. I really really hate it!"

Galli and Nemion grumbled. Moggle was in different group, but Haroon was sure he would be complaining too. For them, it was more important to train more spells to break the wall of 3 circles, or communicate more with the spirits to be more effective. Training swords were out of their mind.

“Haroon, is this fun to you?”

“Yes, more than I thought.”

Galli stuck his lips out, seeing how Haroon smiled getting a wooden sword.

“I can’t understand you. If you were a swordsman or warrior, I might understand but you are a magician, and those looks you give to that wooden sword is...”

“Huhu...”

Galli and Nemion will never understand Haroon until they find out his background.



Students were assigned to a group, and the trainers started giving them the instruction.

“Your goal is to stab the dummy for 1000 times. At the moment you thrust your arms, you must hold your breath, and move precisely. Hit the red points marked on the dummy with enough strength. Once it is hit, the number panel on the next of dummy will turn over. If you don’t make it 1000 times, there is no lunch for you so you’d better give up giving up in the middle of training.”

Trainers warned the trainees. Haroon could hear them sighing here and there.

“Damn it, It is always the food, isn’t it?”

“I know right? And I thought the training would get better today...”

Haroon couldn’t hear others complaining. He was already focusing on the target in front of him.

There were six red spots on the vital points; Forehead, philtrum, neck, both side of chest, and lower abdomen. Haroon targeted the forehead. He posed just as the trainer demonstrated, grasp the wooden sword and thrust his arms.

Wheep! Tak!

He missed. He thought he was on the point, but he probably didn't stab the red spot. He tried several times more, but he could not make it. He tried his best on focusing, and but missing it for a few times more shook his mind too.

"Damn it!"

"What the heck is wrong with this?"

Other trainees seemed to be having hard time with it too. Haroon could hear curses and complains.

'What could have gone wrong? I am sure I did exactly same as the trainer demonstrated...' Haroon thought.

He paused for a moment and stared at the wooden dummy. At the same moment, the Trainer gave a word to him.

"Trainee 123, the tip of your sword is shaking. Stabilize your body first! When your lower body gets stable, the sword goes its way."

'I focused on the target only.' Haroon found out what he was doing wrong.

According to the piece of advice, he was missing the red spot because his body wasn't prepared. He needed to focus before he see the target. Haroon breathed in deeply, and hold his breath. He first checked if his body was stabilized. His legs, waist and hand was slightly shaking. He would certainly miss the target if he tried stabbing now.

Instead of moving, Haroon stabilized his pose repeating the breath. He comfortably breathed in and out, making sure he wasn't short of breath. And when he hold the breath in lower belly, he could experience that his body was stable. At that moment, he knew he could make a precise move.

But it didn't last long. It wasn't long enough to make a move. Still, it was the fruit of his effort. He tried to focus on the breath again.

'Great. I'm stable now.'

As soon as he was certain his body was stable, he stared at the red spot on the dummy's forehead. It was not easy to move focus away from his body. He always lost

concentration moving his arms. When other trainees were wielding their sword, he didn't even try to move his sword. But he didn't feel anxious about it. He found out how, it was only matter of his effort and time.

He seemed to be standing there for quite some time. Eyes half-opened, and no movements like a wooden dummy in front of him. He suddenly moved his shoulder and thrust his wooden sword. With a clear sound, a number panel went over. He made it this time. He dropped his sword because of the aftershock of the strike he made, but there was a smile on his face. It felt like he found the right path.

– Acquired 'Basic Swordsmanship'.

'Could this be a skill?'

Haroon opened a skill window. It couldn't even be displayed since he didn't have any skills.

Basic Swordsmanship(Passive): Lv.1(15.00%)/Lv.5

A basic swordsmanship that every user can learn. Mastering this skill will allow you to

Haroon was overwhelmed with joy. He looked around, and he could see others making progress too. But he didn't feel anxious about not being first. He wasn't competing with others. He was training, and competing with his old self. He was satisfied enough to gain a victory of it.

You have levelled up!

- New stat: 'ExtraSensory Perception'
- New stat: 'Focus'.
- Agility is increased by 1 point.

His effort was rewarded with a level up and a couple of new stats, though Haroon found it weird to level up just by succeeding only one stabbing without any training. Bell has also mentioned that experience point required for leveling up is increased exponentially. It was hard to understand what just happened.

‘Also, there is a stat named ‘Focus’? And I thought ‘ESP’ was for archers or merchants?’ He thought.

It was hard to understand the system of Beyond. He was able to acquire a stat that he thought it is limited to certain class, which meant there is no unique characteristics of each class. Ultimately, this meant there is no advantage for choosing certain class.

‘Well, I can think about this later on. I need to focus on the training for now.’

Since he found out how, there was nothing else could ever stop him. Of course, he failed a few more times, but as the time flows, his sword got more precise and more elaborate. Also, he learnt how to handle the aftershock of the impact. By controlling the amount of power he put, and by twisting the wrist at the right time absorbed it quite much.

The panel began spinning faster and faster.

His group trainer, and adjacent groups’ trainers began to move closer to Haroon as they coach other students. His rapid movement has attracted them. There was Trainer Renny too. She was smiling down at Haroon, who was only concentrating on training.

‘He is gifted. His body is learning the moment of stabbing by instinct. He won’t notice even if a lightning strikes right next to him. His lower body is very balanced just like years trained swordsmen. Is it because of the training I saw earlier on?’

Haroon himself felt the change of his body. He was certain that he was only concentrating on him, his sword, wooden dummy and thrusting his arm, but he could see and feel what he was doing.

‘What is this?’

It was a strange and fresh experience. It felt like another self of he was watching him. It couldn’t be described in words. What he could say was, when he misses the target, he could see with his eyes why he missed the target. But this rich experience didn’t last long. The trainer has interrupted his state by gently hitting his shoulder, and Haroon was upset of losing his another conscious.

“Trainee 123, It’s lunch time.”

“Pardon? Oh, is it lunch time already?”

Haroon looked around. He was the only one trainee in the training ground. He nodded. Maybe stabbing wasn't the hardest training, every trainees already headed to the outpost canteen.

"You were amazing, by the way."

"Huh? I don't know what you mean."

"I never saw someone like you, who can improve and concentrate that much. You might have career even if you train as a swordsman or a warrior."

"Thank you, sir."

The instructor and trainers were all new face to him. He wasn't sure why the unfamiliar trainer acted friendly to him with smile that didn't seem unnatural. When the Trainer headed to the canteen, Haroon didn't know what to do and looked at the wooden dummy.

'Hm? Was that always like that?'

The red spot he targeted was not there anymore. Instead, he saw a small hole there, and a number panel next to the dummy.

2,930

'Wait, Isn't that the number of times I succeeded? Did I really do that much?' he was confused.

He couldn't see anything else, because he focused on the act of stabbing. Someone probably touched his number panel by accident, he thought. Only if he succeeded that much, he hoped.

On the afternoon, they had side and vertical slash training. Unlike stabbing, slashing didn't require momentary force, but more of persistence. For this time, trainees had to target the top of the head and sides of the dummy. Haroon started focusing on his breath. The trainers, other trainees slowly fade out. There was only him and the dummy in his conscious. The tip of sword slowly moved to the top of his head.

The sun was setting. Sword trainer Maycocks came back to the outpost training ground to find his friend Zilean. Zilean was standing right next to one trainee like a statue. He took another look at the trainee. It was the trainee the other trainers talked

about.

“Hey, Zil. Why are you still here? Is it because of him? I heard he is a monster, and I guess he isn’t with the sword?” Said Maycocks.

“Well, this pal has finished the training already.”

“Then why is he still training?”

Maycocks couldn’t understand. Zilean just have to stop him. And he didn’t suppose it is because this trainee is scary.

“He isn’t waking up from the focus.” Zilean replied.

“*What?*”

Zilean had envious look on Haroon, who had exact same movement, using the same amount of power every time he swings his sword.

“But seriously? How could a trainee do that?”

“I don’t know that either. The important thing is, he is doing it, and it is the most valuable training he could have, so I didn’t want to disturb him. And nothing should. That’s why I’m guarding him.”

Maycocks was still in a daze, and took another look at Haroon. His movement was very precise, almost machine-like. His lower body is balanced, and steady that not a typhoon can root him up.

Stabbing, side slash and horizontal slash he was doing was balanced, precise and almost perfect. It wasn’t something that a trainee could make.

“He must have learnt swordsmanship before. But he is amazing though.”

“No, Never. He was same as other trainees at the beginning. The way he grabs his sword, the way he moves... But when I gave him some tips, he was standing steady as if he was meditating, and somewhen, he’s been like that.”

“Is that even possible?”

Maycocks got shocked. What Zilean said didn’t make any sense, but he knew Zilean wouldn’t lie to him. This only meant a complete beginner has reached that level, but he never saw or heard anything like that happening.

“Huh-huh, Yeah, isn’t it crazy? I know how you feel, I envy him as much as you do. I

didn't know a man monstrous like him could exist. At the beginning, I envy him, and I was jealous of him, but now? I admire him. It has been 6 hours, and his movement didn't get off not a single time. I don't think I can be matched with this man. Do you remember how I was called as a tough cookie?"

"Really? He hasn't get out of that state not even a single moment? You must be kidding..."

Maycocks heard the great sorcerers do meditate for days, but he never heard a swordsman concentrating for hours. But a trainee? Who just began training sword?

"No, I'm deadly serious. I've been watching him the whole time. He didn't get out of focus, not even once. Maybe we are teaching a man who will be a legend in the near future."

Zilean and Maycocks kept their position beside Haroon. They even forgot they had to go to the canteen before it closes. There were flames burning in the two trainer's eyes. That was like the eye of travellers who just found a light in the darkness while wandering the wilderness.

Finally, Haroon finished his training when the darkness covered the mountains after the sunset, His clothes was full of sweat and sticky, but he couldn't be in the better mood. He found out how dark it got, and how silent the training ground was.

'Has everybody gone back to the base? Why did they leave me alone?'

He finally found out he was left alone. He thought so, and was surprised to see two trainers watching him.

"Oh! Um..."

"Hmm, are you finished?"

Haroon realized they stayed for his training.

"Yes, I am sorry to make you wa..."

"No, don't be. We've learned a lot too."

"Uh... I'm sorry sir but I don't know what you mean."

Haroon didn't know what was going on, but seeing the trainers smiling at him, he smiled back. He wasn't sure what they've learned but he felt relief that he hasn't

troubled them.

“Let’s go eat then. Trainer Renny told us she has gave a word to the kitchen, so we will still be able to get the meal now.”

“Yes, sir! Thank you a lot!”

He did say yes, but he couldn’t go with them. There was some people waiting for him. Trainers made a bitter smile seeing three trainees waiting for Haroon next to the wagon.

“Right, I forgot trainee 123 is a work-trainee. Thinking of that, I respect how passionate you are.”

“I’m sorry but we’ve got to go first. I will give a word to the canteen so come quickly.”

“Thank you so much.”

Haroon took the frontside of wagon as usual. The other three didn’t push the wagon anymore. Haroon asked for it a few days ago. Haroon had enough strength to pull the wagon alone. The four trainees continued their way with haste, chatting about the day they had.



It has been a week since the sword training began.

“You may know that some trainees already completed the basic swordsmanship before the course began, and some amazing trainees already mastered it by continuous effort, concentration and consistency. So from now on, you will be taking different courses depending on your ability.”

All the trainees faced the same spot. Where Haroon was standing. Everyone knew that Renny was talking about Haroon when she mentioned the amazing trainee.

For trainees who isn’t interested in sword, or need more training, the trainers assigned them the same course they took. For trainees who seemed to be good enough, they provided them a personal space dedicated for them.

“To be honest, training the sword with enchanted dummies are beyond the level of this course. However, we have some talented trainees in this term, so we’ve altered the course a bit. Not only them, but the other trainees too have talents and great spirits

the other trainees of different term didn't have. You guys have been good, so keep up with it. Dismiss!"

Compliment makes an elephant dance, so it did to trainees too. Even though it was very small portion of trainees, they were glad that they could get higher training in their term. Very few overconfident, or those who felt inferior to Haroon, they started falling behind, but others strengthen their ties with the others.

Because of the mercenary groups' competition, more talented trainees tend to join the course. This term was no exception, but there was something special going on. The attitude towards the training and their integrity impressed the trainers, so trainers wanted to give help by their heart, not just habitually.

Some higher trainers, including Renny, presumed that the existence of one trainee has increased the quality of the trainees. It was the trainee 123, Haroon. They saw, how the trainees were not so different from the trainees of the last term, but the existence of Haroon changed everything.

There was two different reaction for Haroon's rapid improvement. The first one was of the magicians; having Haroon in their group made them take pride. One one side, they were envious and had expectation on him. One the other side, they felt shame about themselves that they didn't try so hard which made them to train with honest minds.

The other reaction was from non-magicians of Building B and C. Seeing an unbelievable improvement for Haroon, a magician, some felt jealous of it, and some started spending more time on training, rather than spending their time on feeling jealous of him.

No matter what kind of group it is, there always a thing called mob mentality. This term had heavy influence of it. Even Nemion, Galli and Moogle, who said they hate sword with their heart, they began spending more time on training, too much that they and Haroon had no time for chat. No matter how dark the night gets, the training ground was always full of trainees practicing their sword.



Haroon started training with magic circle engraved dummies. When the magic circle activates, the dummy moves just as a human being, and start attacking the opponent. From that, Haroon learned changing the tactic depending on the situation, and he was hooked on the charisma of swordsmanship.

There were many types of the swordsmanship the dummy use. At the beginning, Haroon couldn't avoid the attacks. He lost count how many times he rolled on the floor after getting hit by those attacks. When he avoided the first one, the dummy moved swiftly and tricky, not letting him to avoid the second one. When he was getting used to the attacks the dummy use, it changed its the way it moves its sword, and left painful marks on the Haroon's body.

His body was covered with bruises, and he even fell unconsciousness several times. When the dummies sneakily attacked the vital points, he simply didn't have enough time to block it, avoid it nor perry it. Not even trainers told him what to do. They were just keeping their place just in case of an emergency situation.

His skin turned blue for at least a week. If he exclude soles and eyes, he couldn't find a single spot he didn't get hit. Getting good at this was not same as gaining stamina or strength. He had very slow progress. He couldn't see the way to avoid 5 continuous attacks. He could simply retreat one or a couple of steps back like the other students, but he didn't. He wanted to learn the way to face it directly.

Trainer Renny couldn't bear watching Haroon, and had to gave a hint that this course may be easily completed by watching the moves the dummy use, and copy it. But Haroon didn't listen to him. Instead, his eyes begin burning even more brightly. His bashful, shy personality couldn't be found anymore. It was gone by the training he took. He was determined not to flee, avoid, or excuse to comfort himself.

'I am doing this, my way.' Haroon thought.

Mind. Haroon found that the mind is very weak thing that if once the will is bend, it wouldn't be able to be controlled anymore, and makes the body be out of the path he need to take. So he determined not to bend his will. Also, he turned off the user interface sounds to ignore it. The main motivation he's been using was the UI, and he wanted the motivation to be more pure, and practical, rather than taking the trainings as a game.

Solid, but naive training, that almost seemed stupid continued day and night. He gave up everything for training, except those works and the basic life things, like eating and sleeping. On his seventh day of personal training, the tip of sword missed and swung right next to his neck. It was the first moment of his training that he avoided the chained attack. As the Trainer Renny said, seeing the sword until the end, and learning with the body helped him a lot. What he didn't do was the copying the move. He's done his own way. That's when he could finally smile.

But that was only the beginning.

Haroon found out there is always a slight movement of feet and shoulder before the sword moves, and he started to be able to relate those moves with how the sword moves. As the time goes, his concentration and observation skill earned him more time to avoid the attacks from very close distance, and make more counter attacks.

On the second week, he was able to avoid every move, and he still had enough time to hit the vital spots on the dummy. Clear, wooden sound echoed in the training ground. Haroon's sword was fast enough to leave afterimage. Then suddenly, he stopped with his sword still vibrating. He stopped because the enchanted dummy stopped moving. He seemed puzzled.

"Congratulation. You've passed level 1. Though, it is very impressive to see how you attacked the dummy without copying its move."

It was Renny. His voice was vibrating because of the excitement he couldn't hide. The purpose of the enchanted dummy is to learn the recorded swordsmanship. And sure, if one can avoid the attacks and counter between the attacks they can pass level one too, but it was very rare, because copying the move was already hard enough for the beginners.

"Level 1, sir?"

Renny was surprised to see that Haroon wasn't impressed by passing level one.

"The goal of level one is to remember the chained attacks of five, and use it to attack the dummy."

"So does that mean it has level 2?"

"Sure do."

Hearing that, Haroon's eyes burn bright again.

"Then I would like to challenge it."

Haroon said with determination. Renny couldn't find the proudness of passing level 1 from Haroon's voice. Renny nodded with smile.

"Then follow me. I have prepared level 2 dummy just in case. The dummy you will face has 10 chained attack of seven different swordsmanship recorded."

"Swordsmanship, sir?"

"Right, Although those are the most basic swordsmanship that young knights or mercenaries learn, but the power and effectiveness of it is proved by various people. Also, I forgot to mention that each swordsmanship has ten different variation, which means you are fighting with 70 different swordsmanship."

Haroon felt his fighting spirit sleeping deep inside his mind, and it was awakening.

"You may pass if you find out those 70 different actions, memorize it and fight the dummy using those actions. By the way, if you pass level 2, you can title yourself as a swordsman. No matter where you go."

Haroon nodded with bright eyes. He wanted to face level 2 before his passion and fighting spirit cools down. He wasn't satisfied by passing level 1. Thinking of his meaningless past days, he couldn't be satisfied just yet.

"I won't walk the same way. That will only make me act like another person. I need to be who I am."

So he face another challenge. His eyes were sweating of fighting spirit. His arm muscles started vibrating with overflowing strength.

It has been month since trainees started training sword. During that time, Haroon was crazy about swordsmanship, that he never logged out in a month. But his effort and concentration were payed back on the last night of the sword training. It was thought to be an impossible thing to do, but he passed, and mastered level 2. Like a fish swimming against the strong stream, Haroon reached the point where he can shrewdly and flexibly evade the dummy's attack, stabbing and slashing the dummy.

- You have mastered ‘Basic Swordsmanship’
- Acquired ‘Sense sword’.

It wasn’t added to your skill list due to the lack of combat experience.

What a glad notice.

He finally mastered the basic swordsmanship, and it created his own personal swordsmanship. It was far from the trainer’s intention, but Haroon finally smiled with satisfaction of confirming his thoughts.

Meanwhile, the sound of enchanted dummy alerting Haroon’s pass drew deep sighs from Renny and other trainers.

Chapter 7

A Threat

It was the afternoon of 30th day of sword training.

“We are finishing the sword training now,” said trainer Renny.

She looked over the trainees with a mixture of emotions. She had all the attention from the trainees, with all their admiration.

“As a Chief instructor of swordsmanship, I have never seen good trainees like you before. I’m proud of how you followed our training well, and it was worthwhile to lead you to the way of swordsmanship. But I also feel bad about not being able to be with you anymore. The other sword trainers probably feel the same,” said Renny.

The trainers’ face was proving her words.

“And now, your course is reaching the last stage as well. The efforts you made during sword training course will be rewarded with the free time of this afternoon, and the new training shall begin tomorrow. For the next month, you will be learning some knowledge that you will need to know as a mercenary, including various weapon skills. If you want, you can continue training swordsmanship as well. This month has the most course in schedule, but since you can choose which one to learn, this month would be both mentally and physically relaxing time.”

Trainees couldn’t hide smile on their face hearing her words. The training were very helpful, and they did try really hard, but they were exhausted from it. They would have give up already if they were training alone.

“Magicians will be allowed to take your cuffs off soon, so you will be able to use your mana again. You’ve got only one month to absorb everything you learn, improve what you’ve got, and fill whatever it is needed, so play the time well. There won’t be any more course prepared for you until you become; a specialist, a leader of a mercenary group or a mercenary guild. So use this opportunity well. Again, It was my pleasure to be with you guys.”

The trainees responded with thunderous applause. It was a greeting of bittersweet parting with the training and trainers. The applause didn't die down for some time, and it moved Renny and the other sword trainers' mind. Though they had to suffer the awkward time because the trainees weren't allowed to leave their place before they hear detailed explanation of rest of the course.



With relaxed minds, the trainees grouped themselves to chat. Haroon was sitting at some distance from them. Not because he couldn't be part of a group, but he just missed the timing as Haroon tried to continue his training and he was stopped by the trainers and Nemion. They persuaded him that he should take a rest at least today.

"By the way, Are you really not gonna tell us? What kind of magic have you learnt? I'm going nuts, because I can't help being curious," Nemion asked.

She's been asking him whenever she gets a chance, and Haroon didn't try to hide that he was alarmed by it that he couldn't say anything about it.

"I see. You still want to be mysterious, don't you?"

"I will tell you later. It is complicated story."

"Huh! You act like you've made an oath of mana."

Nemion seemed to give up as if she felt sorry for Haroon being alarmed. Haroon felt urgent need of changing the subject. He knew she won't give up so soon. Galli approached them just in time, because he was more interested in Nemion than Haroon.

"Hey, Nemi, How did you become an Elementalist? Is there a special way to do it?"

"Well, that's... a secret."

Nemion did good job stopping her mouth, and stared at Galli with a strange look. Her face was clearly saying, 'Don't you magicians are famous for not revealing the method of learning unless you do have teacher-student relationship?'

As soon as Galli mentioned elementalists, Haroon pricked his ears up not to miss a word. In fact, he was under pressure because he heard The Quad Wankers are spreading the suspicion of Haroon that he is not a magician. Even though he was crazy

about sword training, he could clearly hear those words spreading even in right front of him. So if he could, even if it he is going to use just one time, he wanted to learn at least a spell. So Galli mentioning elementalism, Haroon couldn't tear his interest away.

"I just want to know the general things about it, not details. You know, I do have a friend who is a famous Elementalist, and I thought I should know about elementalism briefly so..."

He realized he was being selfish because of the look she just made, and he just made it up to use it as an excuse. But somehow, it seemed to be worked on her. Suspicion was gone away from her face, and the pride rose up to the surface.

"Hohoho! Why, Yes! And also if you are going to say that I was with you on the basic training course, indeed you've got to know more than the others about the elementalists, don't you?"

"...E... Exactly! That's what I mean."

"One needs to be a born mana-sensitive to be a magician, right? It is same to the elementalists. One needs to be born sensitive to at least one of the elements to be a elementalists. By the way, the elements are basically divided into four types.

"Yeah I know that; water, earth, fire, and air. But what do you mean by being 'sensitive' to those elements?"

Galli asked again tilting his head. For Haroon, being sensitive to mana was understandable, but being sensitive to the 'elements' was very hard description to him as he doesn't know anything about magic.

"You don't need to think it hard, Galli. It is just about understanding the nature, and being a friend with it," answered Nemion.

She is making it to be seemed easy, but she did know how hard it is. They say mana-sensitive people are born just one or two in a thousand. And it was one in a hundred thousand for being born element-sensitive, so clearly, it wasn't an easy task.

"Nature?"

"Yes, THE nature that's surrounding us. And among those, the most things you could feel the most is the four elements. When you understand them, and be familiar with them, that's when you become an elementalists."

"You are making it even more complicated."

They continued chatting about the elemental spirits, and Haroon listen to them watching the ground. They say one will need to be born with spirit force, as known as elemental affinity, but there were some method to identify it.

One of it is to put four different object that represents each element, and feeling the properties of it, and if one has elemental affinity, they will be able to feel some kind of force, which is not mana, is flowing around the object.

If one doesn't have high affinity like Nemion does, there is another method, but it was the harder one. It is contracting with the elemental spirits. To do that, they need to draw a magic circle, but they say if your affinity isn't high enough, the spirits refuses to contract with them.

'Good to know.' Haroon thought.

Even though they were just chatting about what they know, those were still very precious information to Haroon. Suddenly, a girl trainee approached to them. She suddenly mocked at Haroon, who was still looking around to see who she came for.

"Hey 123! Well, I guess I can call you Fake now. You are in a big trouble, aren't you?" Said the girl.

"Hey, What do you supposed to mean?" Nemion viciously asked back for Haroon.

The girl turned to Nemion and said,

"I'm just amazed to see how calm he is, despite that everyone will find out that he is not a magician when he takes his cuffs off. Well, I guess it still will be revealed on the last day anyway, even if he hides it until the end. Then the despicable one who recommended him will be punished too."

Those words made Haroon have sudden sinking feeling at heart. But Nemion shook her fingers at the girl, snorting with the anger. The gentle Galli seemed to be very angry at her rude words too.

"Hah, NON-Sense... Sevona, you haven't been burned your fingers yet, huh?"

"Hey, calm down and think straight. What if I am saying the truth, and he is revealed to be a fake? I don't want to see you ruin yourself."

Nemion couldn't say anything. Her face went gloomy. She also haven't heard anything

from Haroon too. Speaking of which, it suddenly felt suspicious that Haroon was not fighting back hearing all those conspiracy. Of course, fighting is prohibited, but there was no reason not to fight back. The girl who was called Sevona had high-handed attitude. No one will be able to make that kind of attitude unless they were certain about it.

Nemion retreated saying nothing.

Haroon looked at the Sevona. She had impressively strong gaze, and firmly closed mouth. As far as he remember, she was one of the striver. She was always near the top of the trainees in every training. But it was not understandable to see her being hostile to him so suddenly. He and she never talked, nor even greet before. He couldn't say anything in surprise. Sevona seemed to be more confident of Haroon's silence.

"Oh. Are the other trainees seems easy on you now because you got the all the attention, aren't we? Or am I talking to the wall? Why aren't you answering?"

"Huh, funny."

Haroon answered, but he couldn't say anything more, only smirking.

"See? I called it."

"Yeah, I did look into his record, but the recommender isn't recorded clearly. Someone scanned him, and he didn't have enough mana to be a magician.

"Hohoho, and see how he is muted to Sevona. That makes things certain."

"Funny how he ignored us, and he petrifies in front of Sevona."

It was The Quad Wankers.

These chaps and bitches probably encouraged Sevona, who had both skills and fame, since they couldn't do anything to Haroon and Nemion who's been ignoring them at all.

Sevona was the daughter of the leader of Bloodmoon mercenary guild. And that guild was the one of the top 10 mercenary guild of The Empire. The Quad Wankers are also the sons and daughters of the guild leaders, but Sevona was on the another level.

Eventually, the jealousy and envy that went down to the deep sea of training started floating on the surface as soon as the training finished. This was all because Haroon had improved too much that no one could compare him on the others.

Trainees are humans too, so it is natural to be grouped by their basis and feel competitive to the others. The trainees of Building A – the magicians – was the group of people who agreed with their physical incapacities so they had expectation and supports to Haroon, but this wasn't the case to the trainees of other buildings.

Even if he was into the training and labor, Haroon habitually listened carefully on the others talking about different affairs. That's how he learnt how things work in the mercenary world. If the fact, that he isn't a magician, is revealed, there were several people who will get in trouble. Even to repay their kindness, he had to hide his identity desperately.

"I don't see why that's a concern to you, and I don't see why I have to answer it because it is too obvious. Just as you said, it will be revealed all later on and why are you so curious about it now?"

"Yikes."

"If you do have time for this, train more and get over me. I think that's more honorable act. Isn't it?"

Sevona cringed her eyes and snorted. Sevona seemed to be upset about that Haroon is maintaining to be calm. But soon, her expression changed into somewhat ambiguous.

"Bluff all you want, but that doesn't make you a magician. There is no magician having mana just about a normal people does. Moreover, it is more strange to see a magician with that much physical ability. I ain't sure who's recommendation you've got, but we have our eyes on you so act well. No mercenary guilds are kind enough to accept people hiding their identity."

Leaving those words, she turned back smiling and went to the group who were waiting for her. The Quad Wankers surrounded her as if they became her subordinates, and walked away bossing around.

"Haroon, never mind them. They are just jealous of your magnificent improvement. Well, there was not a magician showing that much physical ability. Also, there is a rumour that the trainers already have decided to give you the title of the top trainee, so having a few trainees being jealous of you cannot be avoided. But really, where are you from? Why are you not telling us? I'm curious of it too."

"I... promised not to tell anyone about it."

Haroon couldn't help but to lie. Well, it was not a lie to be precise. He promised with McKin to maintain silence about his identity. Fortunately, Galli didn't even doubt Haroon's identity as a magician, unlike Nemion who couldn't stop watching Sevona heading her room.

"You didn't swear an Oath of Mana, right?"

"How did you..."

He didn't even know what that was, but Nemion has once mentioned it, so he raised his voice as if he was surprised.

"Oh god! You did. For what reason did you do that for that minor thing? Don't tell me you didn't know you will lose all of your mana if you break it. You should have thought before you do it."

"....."

"So that's why..."

Galli's word brightened Nemion's face a bit. Haroon could see Nemion was making 'I'm sorry' face. Seeing those eyes, he let a sigh of relief in his mind. It was fortunate that Galli jumped to a quick conclusion, which prevented the worst scenario, but it was impending. If the truth is revealed, it would be a giant scar to both Galli and Nemion, who both were pure and kind.

"Well, you can always show your real magical ability on the talent show scheduled on the last day, so don't mind the rumors. I can't wait to see what kind of face they will make seeing your magic."

"Su, Sure, yeah."

Haroon couldn't feel more guilty saying that.

He thought all he will do is training, but he couldn't avoid being a member of group and making relationships. As soon as the truth comes out to the surface, Elser and McKin will get in trouble for expediently admitting him in.

'And it is too late to say he was able to join only because there was only one room available in building A'

Only if that cornered room wasn't famous for decades for being haunted. Only if that

room wasn't available that McKin and Elser wasn't able to put him in the course.

"Damn it!" he couldn't help but to curse.

As soon as the the labor was done, he came back to his room and locked the door to logout. He was free at that time, so he was going to learn the basic of magic with Bell's help.



When he came back to the real life, twin-tailed Bell welcomed him. The cute face brightened as if she felt longing for the reunion. He was careless not being back for a month, though it was a game time.

"Bell, how has it been?"

– "Nothing much, Captain!"

Nothing much, no doubt. Haroon didn't have any friend after all, except Jinsoo living in the next door, but he is probably busy with Beyond as well.

'Maybe I should pay him a visit,' he thought.

Jinsoo was seeking to find a career as a dark gamer, so he might be a great help giving him user's info that Bell might not be able to find. But he was too shy to bother him in the middle of gaming. Haroon thought for a moment, and went back into the capsule again.

"Bell, would you gather some info about magic?"

– "Yes, Captain."

"Focus on how Beyond magicians learn the magic."

– "Yes, Captain, but..."

Bell hesitated for some reason. She made weird expression on her face.

"Why? Is something wrong?"

– "Well... Are you... really the Captain? More than that... you st... stink."

After looking up and down at him, Bell held her nose with her hands.

“What about me? And what do you mean I stink? I don’t smell anyth-ugh! What on... Union!”

He found his body was covered in pile of dirt, and then he could smell the foul smell. It could be compared to the garbage dump he go every day. As soon as he sense the smell, he held his nose with his hands without realizing he was.

– “Take a shower first. I will get the information ready.”

“Thanks.”

Haroon charged to the gap between the capsule and the cover which just started opening. Haroon couldn’t face Bell directly.

“Damn it!”

Even though she isn’t a human being, it was still an embarrassing moment. Being naked didn’t matter much as he thought she is very young, but this was completely different affair. He was too embarrassed to notice that Bell can smell things. He sat in the bathtub which just started filling. He did take shower every day, but he wasn’t him when he came back to his room after the hard training. So he’s been washing his body briefly with water, and this was the result. He took an hour in the bathtub washing the dirts away to be confident enough to stand in front of mirror.

“Oh... Oh? Who are you?”

There was stranger in the mirror. He was numbed for moment. Who am I and what am I was the only the words he could think of. He paid close attention to the face. Cold eyes, double eyelids only on one eye, high nose...

“Oh, it’s me!”

It was.

The man in the mirror was himself. His skeleton-like body has changed so much. His cheekbones still stood out a bit, but he gained some weight enough to be considered handsome-ish. Also, he saw his body was covered with small but dense muscles. It was very unfamiliar look, but it was clearly him. He couldn’t believe how such a tall, thin skeleton can changed into the man in the mirror just in 2 months in game time. This was the result of training day and night.

“Huhuhu, That’s pretty cool.”

Haroon liked himself reflected on the mirror. He hasn’t been caring much about his outlook. He actually gave up making a good image of him since he thought his look was too bad to be improved. But the present look of him was quite manly, even to his own eyes.

‘So my in-game character’s change does work on my actual body. Then how about strength?’

As soon as he gets out of the bathroom, he looked for a heaviest object in his house. That was the refrigerator. Even with Human’s technology, they couldn’t make it more compact or any lighter, so the fridge was still too heavy for an average man to lift alone. Moreover, the fridge was 2.5 m high. Lifting it with bare hands was nowhere near enough for a normal man.

Haroon, however, smiled after bending his arms. He was confident of being able to lift it. He even lifted the boulder as big as his entire body before. There were some boulders that was too heavy, but he was able to lift them all at the end.

Haroon hugged the fridge and put strength on the muscles. It wasn’t light, but it was easily lifted. The weight he could feel with his arms were so different now than before he play the game.

“Huh... Huh...” He lost word, but soon, he laughed with joy so hard that he could blew the house away.

“Ahahaha! HAHAHA!”

He couldn’t believe even after he checked his own body. It only has been 20 days in real life, and his body gained unbelievable strength. After leaving the fridge alone, he looked for a heavier object, and he found one. It was Bell, the capsule that two healthy workers barely carried in. It might be too heavy for him as well.

When he put his strength on his arms, the arm muscle got big as if it was going to burst. The longer side of capsule started lifting even though he didn’t put much strength. When he put more strength, the capsule lifted up high in the air. And he still had more strength to spare. As some evidences, he wasn’t sweating, nor his veins were popping out of his neck. He didn’t even have any problem moving it around.

“YEEESSSS!!” He joyfully screamed, carefully moving the capsule down to the ground.

He was so glad that he couldn't help but to whistle, and he rushed into the capsule.

– “Oh my, who is this?” Bell asked with surprised look as if she never met him before.

“Haha! Come on, forget what you saw earlier, blow it all the way to the Andromeda.”

– “I must say you became so handsome, Captain.”

Bell's eyes were in dreamy mood. It was quite same to those girls falling to the handsome boy group band. Haroon recalled Bell saying she would learn a lot of the world when he isn't around. She probably watched too much TV drama shows.

‘Where did this little girl learned that kind of thing...’ he thought.

– “By the way, Captain, I sensed the hardware was lifted by some kind of force. What was it?”

Bell wasn't asking because she didn't knew. She is the capsule after all. She was flattering.

“Hahaha! You sneaky, you are so cute.”

Haroon felt special bond with her even though she is just an image. He thought it would be really happy to have a sister like her.

“Bell, call me Oppa instead of Captain or Haroon. Got it, Bell?”

– “‘Oppa’, you said?”

Bell has been popping out her cheeks, and his sudden request widen her eyes.

“You know I'm an orphan, right? I want you to be my little sister from now on.”

– “But Captain... Is Captain...”

“What does the title matter? Anyway, call me Oppa from now on.”

– “Why... Yes!”

She hesitated for a bit, but she answered with most loud voice she ever made. She was blushing too.

‘What an amazing A.I she is, I really cannot tell a difference from a human being.

Seeing how Bell acts, Haroon never could admit that she is the capsule. Rather than suffering from the confusion, he thought it would be better to think her as a younger sister instead.

“And show me what you’ve collected.”

– “OK, Oppa.”

Bell’s ability was really amazing. It didn’t take long for her to collect and analyze thousands of information. What she has collected were thicker than his finger.

‘Amazing!’ he thought.

– “Oppa, Do you want me to read it for you or do you want me to tell you the summary of it?”, Bell asked with silly smile on her face.

“Huh? You can even summarize that? That much information?”

– “Sure. I might look young to you but I am hyperconscious A.I, remember?”

He didn’t know much about her ability, but he could tell that she had great confidence. As Haroon remained silence, Bell assumed it to be ‘yes’, and started briefing about being a magician.

– “You have to be at least level 10 to be a magician, which is the level you can get into a class. If you gain enough Soul Point, you may be friend with NPC magicians including Elfs, or grant access to a spell book of one of the tower of magic you want. Note that any type of magic would learn same spell until you reach 3 circle.

“Which means I can be a magician!”

Haroon was glad to hear that he can be a magician. Which means he won’t trouble Elser and McKin.

– “Theoretically, Yes. But you are in the middle of training course, and Metropolis doesn’t have a place for class advancement.”

“Right, Damn it.”

He didn’t think of it. To get into a class, he needed to go to certain places. It was the ‘kind’ rule that Necomwall intended to allow users to gain enough Soul Point and ability on the way to the job advancement site.

– “Well, you may learn a spell using a spell book but there are some problems. Number one, you are not allowed to leave the academy. Two, even if you ask someone to get it for you, you don’t have any money to buy a spell book.”

“Spell book? How much does it cost?”

– “1 Circle spell book costs 10 to 50 gold.”

“In Hell!”

He didn’t thought that just a book would cost that much.

“How about the exchange rate, Bell?”

He didn’t have much money too, as it was an emergency situation, he even considered using his real money.

– “It just went over \$100 per one gold.”

“So one silver is one dollar. And even the cheapest spell book would be \$1000.”

– “Right, and no. Even if you want to buy money, it is impossible to collect that much. The average user’s level are too low for hunting or class advancement, which is the basic source of learning money.”

She may be right. Thinking how the top player was only level 9, and the fact that it takes about 2 to 3 weeks to the job advancement cities by walking, according to the announcement made once ago, not many players would have get a class yet.

– “There are still more problems even they did. Since Beyond seek for the another reality, item drop rate or quest success rate is good to be called ‘none’ compared to other games.”

Haroon smacked his lips feeling unfortunate. But that was the also the reason why Beyond suited more gamer’s taste. Unlike the ordinary games where one could master in few month, or few years, the real fun of levelling up with putting incomparably much more effort has pressed down the complains and unkindness of the game system.

– “Not many items are released yet, and most of the users started in remote village, so economy hasn’t been active yet. So the exchange rate became \$100 per 1 gold, \$1 per 1 silver, but trading isn’t really active yet.”

“What should I do then? This is driving me nuts.”

The point is that there isn't much money available. It wouldn't much matter if he could buy gold from the NPC society, whereas the levelling speed was too slow that user's were not capable of earning any money yet.

Money exchange can be made at Necomwall's official exchange site. But they don't trade real money to gold, they only trade gold into money. This is mainly because Necomwall concerned real life's economy affecting the game, so they decided to offer one-direction exchange. Trading item didn't matter. Although there just wasn't so many resources to make trade between users just yet. If it was the other games, the active movements of Dark Gamers would have made the trade very active, but the system preventing real money to interfere the game didn't allow that to happen so fast. Instead, Dark Gamers were focusing on levelling up.

– “There is another problem, Oppa. In beyond, reading a spell book doesn't grant you an ability to use magic. There is a system called ‘Magic Experience’. This means you won't be able to use the spell properly if you don't gain enough experience by training it. Moreover, just like advanced sword skill books, spell books that has skills over 3 circle cannot be acquired from the tower of magic. It is set to be only obtained from the hunting. It won't matter if you are lucky enough to meet a great sorcerer as your teacher. Also, note that the statistics so far say that magicians are the most hardest class to level up. What it makes even harder is that every gamers are going to train sword skill at low level, and they will still have to go to the class advancement site. “Hmm, Is that so?”

In Beyond, it would be more weird to see gamers suddenly being able to use a spell right after they get a class. That point was very likeable. Beyond was keeping the natural law that nothing can be earned without sweat and effort.

– “Of course, there are some spells that can be learned without any source.”
“Really? What is it?”

Haroon jumped up where he sat. He didn't have any money to boost him, nor he could leave the academy yet. If he had chance, what Bell will say will be only the chance.

– “Even though not every class has been revealed yet, the world of Beyond's outline is still visible. It is the fantasy world. The almost every common elements of the famous fantasy novels written before the time of Human Calendar is implemented in Beyond. Of course, there is Elementalism.”

“Yes, you may be right.”

He didn't need to look far. His friend Nemion is Elemental magician, as known as Elementalist.

“But how do I learn it?”

– “That could not be found anywhere. No users has advanced to the Elementalist, at least not in official record. Some people suggests that it might be a hidden class, but nothing is revealed yet. If there is a way to be an Elementalist, there is only one way to find it out; your effort.”

Haroon felt miserable at Bell's word. He recalled the words what Nemion said before he logout, but nothing really could help him.

“I don't think I can make it. But for now, please gather the information about the popular fantasy or fusion novels of the Ages of Doom, and analyze the part about the elemental magic.”

– “Got it.”

The base of the world of Beyond is probably inspired by the novels he is looking for. Then the method of learning elemental magic, and other kinds of magic would exist in the novel too. He couldn't think of better move than reading the corresponding part of the novels. It was fortunate to have Bell since he didn't need to buy e-books or go to library to check it out himself.

Most of the novels were lost in the war of Doom. So there weren't so many novels available to him. The first novel Haroon chose was “The War of Goddesses, then and the after” published in 2022.

The common theme of the novels of that time is that it is easy to read, vicarious, sensationally detailed visual description of the other world. He has read this kind of novel many times, so he looked for the part where elementalism is described. With Bell's help, he checked several books, but they were not so different. He couldn't find any more detail than what Nemion said. But he couldn't give up there, so he decided to see even minor parts.

“According to what you analyzed, what is ‘Affinity with Elemental Spirits’?”

– “It is hard to define what it is. Every author defines it differently, so it is hard to describe, but if I must, It would be the ability or sensing which elemental spirit an

object has.”

“Which cannot be artificially trained, and needed to be born with it?” Which was what Nemion said. But he needed to confirm.

– “That’s right. Most of the Elementalists presented in Fantasy novels are usually borned to be, like Elfs”

“So, Elementalism might not be related to me, who is an user?” Haroon asked, giving a sigh.

“I... I guess that’s very likely.”

Haroon felt his inner body twitching on Bell’s word. He give a deep sigh and shut his eyes. Another possibility was gone away.

He looked for more books, but no answers was there. He wasn’t surprised, since ‘Fantasy’ only exists in the human’s imagination.

Haroon logged back into Beyond to get enough sleep.

TL Notes:

I lately realized that Renny is a male character. God damn it I assumed his gender by his name. Good thing is that, we are not going to see him anymore.

Chapter 8

Polluted spirit, 'Brat'

Just as Renny mentioned, there were various types of training provided.

Unlike stamina or sword training, the trainers opened lectures that would be necessary for the mercenaries, and trainees were free to take whichever they want. But most of the trainees didn't really need to take most of the subjects, as they already learned those in the mercenary guilds they belong. Taking subjects like Simple accounting or information gathering methods was not really need for the accountant and officers; Searching, setting or disassembling traps was not popular for the combat mercenaries. The popular subjects for them were classifying the level of quests, or how to conclude favorable quests; so-called 'profitable lectures'.

'I must learn everything,' thought Haroon.

So he registered for every single subject. It was hard to manage the time as he was a work-trainee, but not all lectures were open for a whole month so he wouldn't be able to take it if he misses it. This was a big fortune to him. But this made another misunderstanding to the others.

"That guy is trying to gather attention again."

"Maybe he is a spy to collect information about this course."

But Haroon didn't care it much. He was getting enough stress from the Quad Wankers, Sevona's suspicion.

'Even if I am going to be revealed, I need to learn as much as possible when I have a chance.'

Haroon knew well enough how precious the chance of education is. He already suffered from missing it in real life. What he learns in the Academy was quite different from what he learned in the real life, but it will be the base of the living in the world of Beyond.

His morning wasn't so different from his previous days. In the morning, he participated in the course teaching the intellects that every mercenary should know. Simple outdoor-cooking, Accounting, Scouting/Searching, Setting up/disassembling traps, skinning monsters or beasts' leathers. He registered for every class the trainers provided.

In the afternoon, He participated in a simple medical treatment course and several others, including throwing weaponry.

The first lesson of throwing weaponry. There were various types of throwing weapons displayed in front of trainer Bottus. From the throwing knives to the daggers, many fancy weapons attracted the trainees' eyes. Almost half of the trainees have registered for this course.

"As you can see, there are lots of types of throwing weaponry and hidden weaponry in the world. Every weapon has a different purpose, so the way to handle them differs as well. Since they are small, this might look easy, but size doesn't mean everything. Handling throwing knives requires investing time and sweat as much as learning swordsmanship."

Everyone brightened their eyes. Maybe throwing weaponry could be the most necessary skill for the trainees who participated in the basic training course.

"The basic of handling a throwing weapon is finding the center of mass, and understanding the trajectory and revolution fundamentals. You will learn it by practicing in groups with explanations from your group's trainer. In this course, you will be learning six-bladed shurikens, flying knife, or last but not least, daggers. Some say this is easier than the sword. But mastering it needs training, effort, concentration and repeating those three over and over. Since the time is short, you won't be training all three. That being said, you will be throwing all three types today, and choose which one you will train for the rest of the course. Do you copy?"

"Yes, sir!"

The trainees' voice got louder unlike before. Since these trainees are not capable of combat situation, it was more effective to use throwing weapons or hidden weapons rather than training swordsmanship or other weapons. It would be life-saving ropes later on, so their attitude toward the training couldn't be the same.

After the trainer's explanation and demonstration, they gave some time for the trainees to train on their own. While practicing, Haroon nodded alone as he thought

he understood what Bottus, the retired mercenary, said about mastering the throw.

Swords need its center of mass at the center to be wield stably. But the throwing weapons were very different. Depending on its center of mass, the revolution speed, turning radius and trajectory all differed. He was too quick to think that it would be easier than the swordsmanship. Different types of throwing weapons had different properties, and he even noticed that each one has slightly different center of mass after he threw some of them. It was another score made by his concentration. It felt like the grip of weapons were automatically positions itself into his hands. He's got a good feeling about it.

After practicing the throwing, he practiced his sword with the enchanted dummy with Chief Trainer Schultz's permission. He covered his dinner by the food he packed during lunch time.

He asked Moggle, Mannen and Rose to do the evening labor. In return, he did morning and noon labor all alone. Since the size of the meal has gradually increased, so the amount of left-overs are decreased, he was able to do it alone.



The time flew went by, and it was D-10 the graduation day.

It rain on and off for few days. And on that morning, it started raining so much as somebody drew a hole into the sky. It wasn't the circumstance that they could continue the outdoor training. Some courses were already finished, so trainees could take a rest in a while. But Haroon couldn't enjoy the unexpected holiday, because unexpected labor was ordered.

"Seeing how it smells so bad, an animal's corpse is rotting, or somewhere is blocked. I didn't want to order cleaning the drainage, but the smell is so bad that even I couldn't prevent the labor ordered from the higher place," Schultz commended, with an apologetic expression.

"Don't worry, sir. We know well how you have been considerate to us. Thank you for that."

Moggle replied, representing the work-trainees.

"The air might be toxic, so be careful."

The four trainees left the Schultz's office, and went to the tool house. There was rubbery working clothes and tools to pick up the rotting objects.

"Rose, take some antidote just in case," said Moggle.

"Got it," said Rose, returning to her room with hurry.

As a trainee who want to be a healer, she had different kinds of antidote.

The four trainees walked side by side to the entrance of the drainage. Just as Schultz said, the foul smell numbed their nose.

"It feels like my nose is rotting."

"Woah, I'm dizzy."

Mannen's and Rose's face went pale. Moggle endured it well, but as soon as he arrived the entrance, he fell down to the ground. The rain was preventing the smell to be spread, but still the smell was very murderous, and caused dizziness.

"Hey, Moggle, Wake up. Moggle, MOGGLE!" Mannen shouted, shaking Moggle violently."

Moggle couldn't wake up easily. He seems to be conscious, but he couldn't move his arms nor legs. Rose was already holding her nose not knowing what to do about him.

"Oh my gosh. Haroon, I will carry him to his room, so wait here or go into the drainage with Rose first. I will catch up soon."

Haroon nodded slowly.

Moggle he knows wouldn't fake illness in order not to clean the drainage. He thought it might be vital seeing how Moggle is. When he saw Mannen and Moggle's appearance fade out in the fog of heavy rain, he prepared to enter the drainage. Since he worked at the crematorium, he could endure the smell well enough. He was intending to check what is going on in the drainage before Mannen comes back.

"Rose, if you think you can endure the smell, Let's go in together. We don't know what we need, so let's only see what it looks like."

"Ogay. Led'z gou," said Rose, making nasal sound as she was holding her nose with wet

clothes.

Haroon went first holding the iron sword he brought just in case.

The wet footsteps echoed in the drainage. They wasn't sure when it was built, but the scale of drainage was quite big. Not even the real life drainage would be built this well. There were luminous stones driven into the top of drainage. It didn't seem expensive, but it gave enough light for Haroon and Rose. Nothing is more scary than the intense darkness. When they could see, there was nothing to fear of. Haroon even saw the corpses torn wide of by Harks, or flattened corpses by traffic accidents.

Squick! Squiiick!

The sudden appearance of two people scared the rats and they ran to every direction screaming sharp noises. They were brown rats living in the drainage.

"Holy!" cried Rose.

She sttuck to the Haroon's back as she was disgusted by them, or is really scared of the surroundings. Haroon could feel how terrified she was from the vibration he could feel.

"Rose, wait me at the entrance. I will see what's inside."

"Got it, Oppa."

Rose ran to the entrance as she was waiting his order.

Haroon kept going forward. There definitely was something seeing how the smell gets tense. It felt like a giant sized animal's corpse was rotting. As he walks in more deeper, he could smell sour and smoky water with bad smell. He walked into little square.

It was where water from several smaller pipes join altogether and leave to where Haroon walked in from. But a lot of dumps formed a little dam, and trapped quite big chunk of water. That was where the rotting smell coming from.

Haroon made a whole to dam with a metal club he brought. Trapped water rushed its way out to small hole. Most of the dumps got carried away, so the smell did. But the murderous smell didn't go way yet.

Haroon went deeper.

Squiiick! Squick! Squick!

Rats ran away between the rotting water and wastes, into the cracked walls and in every direction. Because the drainage wasn't cleaned for a while, and it was too close to the food-waste dumping site, it became a habitat for the rats...

After a while of walking, when he arrived the passage the foul smell was coming from, something appeared from the cornered area where even the dim light couldn't reach. It was a giant rat, brown and shag furred, red eyed and it was as big as a cat. It was staring at Haroon, and was giving him a warning with horrifying scream and exposing its sharp fangs.

Squiiick! Squick! Squick!

"That's really big. I think people should call it cat-shaped rat monsters."

He didn't feel any fear from them. What else can a rat be? He thought. But Rats didn't run away seeing Haroon approaching them. Instead, their little eyes turned red as if they were preparing the attack.

"Well, I guess it is rat hunting season now."

Haroon put down the iron club which was too long to be used. And he firmly hold his favorite iron sword. Even if his first enemy was the rats, he thought they might be big enough to be a good practice targets of what he learned from the enchanted dummy.

There were more than 20 rats. Even though they are just rats, that size and sharp fangs and claws might hurt him, so Haroon was inwardly nervous.

SQUICK!

With sharp cry, one of them jumped at Haroon with its claws exposed. Haroon's sword swung vertically at its head without any hesitation, and the rat's body fall down to the ground, being cut in half. It act as an aggro to the rest of the rats, so they attacked as a whole.

'One at a time.'

Haroon swung his sword and twisted his upper body to face and cut two of the rats attacking from his front side. He could feel the weight from his sword cutting the bodies. He actually could feel he was cutting something. But there was no time for thinking. It was a race against the time as the rats were attacking from every direction.

Haroon punched a rat jumped above his head with his left hand, and swung his sword. With a short bursting sound, the flesh and blood splatted to everywhere.

“Ugh!”

There was a sudden pain in his left shoulder. He could see a rat’s head when he turned his head to the shoulder. There was his blood stained on its fang.

“You freak!”

He tried to pull of the rat with his left hand, but he couldn’t as it felt like his whole shoulder is being torn off.

“Blast!”

He couldn’t give all his attention to the one on his shoulder. Another rat has already approached to bite his right thigh. Haroon roughly spun his body and swinging his sword. Three of the rats got into the swords track, and got killed crying out sharp noises. But the one biting his sword as still there.

“You dirty rats! You are all dead to me.”

Haroon got mad when he saw the blood. Not only the blood, but the pain bullying his whole body. And he felt like he was getting weak.

‘What is wrong with me?’

He was sure that he was getting sick. Haroon violently swung his sword to expel the rats, and re-enabled the U.I. sound. It didn’t take long until he could hear the notification. It probably repeated for several times already.

– You are deeply poisoned by the rat bite.
[Receiving 15 damage per 10 second.]

He never heard there is poison in rat's fang. But he couldn't let the rat to bite his shoulder anymore. Haroon moved his sword to his left hand, and pulled rat's head with his right hand. Strong burning pain still left in his shoulder. There was a lump of Haroon's flesh stuck in the rats fang.

"You vicious..."

Haroon couldn't think straight anymore seeing the rat's mouth full of flesh and blood. He gnash his teeth with unbearable anger. He couldn't let himself be fed by the small creatures like rats.

"Die, rats!"

He threw the rat at the wall as hard as he can. The rat's head got crushed, and the blood blurred to the dirty water below.

'These are not just ordinary rats. These are monsters.'

He wasn't going to spare those rats anyway, but now he didn't have any reason to let them live since they were eating humans. Forgetting that he had to stop the bleeding, he straightened the pose he hold the sword. It will be different this time.

With a strong kick of the water, his sword flew with a tremendous speed. The sword penetrated the rat that was already jumping to him, and the sword head to the rat right next to him.

'This isn't any ordinary rats.'

As if rats has sensed that Haroon has great skills, they surrounded him and they attacked him successively or at the same time. They already had great combat experience.

Haroon's body started move fast and precisely.

He couldn't waste time by swinging the sword in big radius, so he mainly used stabbing and slashing and twisting his body at the same time. The rats fall to the ground making sharp cries.

"Huff... Huff..."

Haroon breathed heavily killing all 20 rats. He used too much power facing irregular attacks, which was very different from the enchanted dummy which had dedicated skill routes.

"Ugh, It hurts too much."

His shoulder was bleeding too much. Fortunately, he didn't lose too much flesh, but the poison has discolored the clothes into black. Haroon decided to retreat for now. Haroon felt dizzy, but he wasn't sure if it was because of the poison, or if it was because he moved too much. He managed to stagger out of the drainage, but the pain and dizziness coming from the wound couldn't make him realize that he was breathing the fresh air.

"Oh my gosh. Oppa, What happened to you?"

Fortunately, Rose hasn't returned to her room awaiting him.

"Just, give me a sec," said Rose, preparing something.

Rose healed him with a practiced hand. She revealed the wound by tearing out the section of cloth, and took a pocket out of her cloth, and sprinkled what it contained on the wound. Haroon couldn't help but to scream because of the hair-raising pain.

"Hang in there, even it hurts. It is detoxing the wound."

A sweat of pain formed on Haroon's brow. Only if he knew it was going to hurt, he would have lowered the sync rate a bit. It was automatically set to 55% at the moment, which was the high capacity of the current state of his body. Because of that, the pain was so vivid.

Nemion finally gave a sigh of relief only after wiping out the wound with a cloth torn out from her sleeve.

"All right. I can see your blood is clear now. The detoxification was successful. And since this medicine is very good, you will be cured in just few days without living any scars."

Rose added, tearing out the other sleeve and applying it on his shoulder with some kind of medicine.

Haroon felt he was losing control of his body, and he forced it to linger in. He bled too much blood in such a short time that it made him dizzy and feel like vomiting. He was tempted to sleep, but his rage woke him up.

“What happened, Oppa? Don’t tell me it was the rats.”

“It was. They attacked.”

“Are you serious? Rats, attacking humans...?”

Rose dreaded the thought of facing them.

“When I went deep into the drainage, there were rats as big as the cats. But those were not just any ordinary rats. I believe those were some kind of monsters. They probably tasted the flesh and blood of humans. They won’t have attacked me unless they haven’t.”

Rose shuddered saying nothing.

His body recovered after some time. Just as Nemion said, the medicine Nemion applied was very effective. He still could feel his body burning, and the pain came back sometimes, but it wasn’t uncomfortable to use his left arm.

“It’s show time.”

Haroon put away his sword, and checked the throwing knives leather holder which he couldn’t even think of using it during combat. He prepared it to train after the cleaning, and now it was fortunate that he brought it. Cross belted leather holder had 20 daggers. It was quite reassuring to see them.

“Oppa, It is dangerous to go alone.”

Rose stopped him heading back in.

“No, I was just careless last time. I didn’t face them seriously because I thought they were just big rats.”

“But, don’t go. Not now... Let’s come all together later on. No, let’s report to the headquarter. Then they won’t order us to clear the drainage anymore.”

“We will report, but not now. I will come back if I don’t think I can do it alone. Let’s report after I come out.”

Haroon gnashed his teeth. He determined to be changed, and get strong, so he didn’t want to flee from whatever the danger is. That didn’t mean he will make unnecessary fights or risk himself to be in unfair battle, but he determined not to step back that easily.

‘And they ate my flesh and drank my blood.’

Rose retreated seeing how determine Haroon was. She suddenly took out two little sacks from her chest and handed it to Haroon.

“Oppa, this is some antidote, and this is injury remedy. Bead shaped one is the antidote, and injury remedy is a powder that you can sprinkle on the wound. It will be very effective, but it won’t prevent the pain too.”

“Thank you, Rose. And If I don’t come back in an hour, would you report to the HQ? Wait for me here until then.”

“Got it. But do you really think this is good idea?”

“I told you I was just careless. I will run out as quick as I can when I think it is going to be dangerous, so don’t worry.”

Saying that, Haroon came back to the drainage. Rose was left alone, but she wasn’t brave enough to follow him.

Haroon’s boots splashed water, and the sound of it echoed in the drainage. It was after the commotion of the combat, so tiny rats already hid and wasn’t coming out. It didn’t take long for him to arrive where he had combat since he knew the way so he walked faster than before.

“Hmmm.”

Curiously enough, there was nothing there. The corpses has disappeared while he was curing his wound, which means there is another party of them, or another kind of cleaning monster exists. Haroon proceed his way following the luminous ores. An offensive smell from the water kicked in his nose, but he still could endure it.

‘Don’t let me catch you, ‘cause I will smash you into ashes.’

His anger risen up to the top of his head allowed him to endure the smell. It took five more minutes for him to reach another square.

It seemed that he was at the central part of drainage. It was full of indescribable smell, and toxic gas exhaled from the bubbles of rotted water. Haroon torn off one of his sleeve and covered his nose down. He wasn't able to endure them anymore. It was at that moment when he heard a familiar voice.

– You have found a dungeon of Catrats.

‘What? Dungeon of Catrats?’

Seriously, where did that came from? He found a dungeon so easily. He opened his mouth without knowing hearing he found a dungeon.

Dungeon of Catrats (E Class, Temporary dungeon)

Dungeon of Catrats that eat rotten and polluted stuffs. When their number increases, they eat each other in order to control the population. When its number is at the peak, the smell of the drainage gets tense, and as they eat each other, the smell gets weakened. Catrats are cat sized rats, and they are armed with sharp claws and their fangs with strong bio-poisons stored inside created by eating polluted materials.

The dungeon shall be cleared by killing a Boss Monster ‘Polluted Ratcat’.

As a very first discover, you will be rewarded with 20 Soul Points, and doubled item drop rate. Clearing the dungeon will grant you a random chance to acquire a mystery item.

– You will gain 100 fame if you register the dungeon.

Do you want to register the dungeon?

“No,” said Haroon.

Even if he coincidentally found it, he didn't want to register the dungeon. A normal user might be spent by smells and toxic gases on their way to the dungeon. And he doesn't know the true value of it, so he didn't dare to register it.

‘Undiscovered, and temporary... I am so lucky that I found it when it was on. And Finally, Soul Points! And possibly a mystery item...! Huhuhu!’

Before he knew it, he was laughing with joy that he found a dungeon. Temporary means it needs specific circumstances to be opened. No other users will be able to enter this dungeon in short period of time. Haroon smiled and stepped forward to the central part of the square. It was then when he could sense something was coming to him. It was slight sound of that swimming towards him. Haroon took a throwing dagger out and looked for a move.

Squuiick! Squick Squick!

Yes, it was Catrat. Haroon suffered by being surrounded by them last time, so he didn’t hesitate to throw his daggers.

Squiiick!

As the blade of the dagger penetrates the flesh of its head, it made disgusting sound and stuck its nose at the rotten water. But at the back and side of it, there were too many Catrats charging at him.

“Bring it on.”

By fighting them for once, he found out how he should be using his sword, and he was confident with it. Even though he was outnumbered, the catrats only had sharp fangs and claws. He knew he shouldn’t be using formulaic swordsmanship. By instinct, he learned the swordsmanship of finding out the gap, and attacking the vital points. What he only need was being careful, and nothing would be hard then. But he couldn’t risk being surrounded.

Haroon backed a wall and rapidly threw the daggers. He only needs to deal with three sides now. He thought he wasn’t experienced enough to face his back as well. As it only took a blink of an eye to kill about 15 catrats, the rest of them cried horrifying sound and rushed their way to Haroon, not fearing death.

“Yeah, that’s the spirit!”

Mad catrats were not hard enemies like the first time. His experience made him calm.

Their attacks were too straightforward to be not able to avoid, and their size was too big that he couldn't miss. Haroon's sword only consist of basic moves of slashing and stabbing, but Catrat's corpses were being piled up around him as a wall.

'It was only matter of not fearing. I can see their moves very clearly.'

A little enlightenment. He was able to find out how he should move, if he throw away the fear and see the situation with clear-headed eyes. And also, the enlightenment came with a reward.

–ESP is increased by 1 point.

'ESP' seems to be related with the dynamic visual activity. As the stat rise, he was able to see catrat's move more clearly, even in the deem light, and it felt like they were even slower. His sword kept moving.

Squick! Squiick...

Now it was almost sad to hear catrat's screams. They kept attacking him, but Haroon didn't even get short of breath at all. By instinct, he was learning to use only the minimum movement needed. Haroon was exited, and started to slowly move forward.

He was being attacked by four side now, but he could sense the attacks from behind him. His sword moved more swiftly, and more smoothly. When the dead body of catrats made a bridge along the way Haroon moved, the attacks stopped. Was all catrats killed?

– Learned how to use swordsmanship 'Sense Sword'

Sense Sword (Passive)

Lv.1(20.00%)/Lv.5

Sense Sword is basic swordsmanship, and it consists of 5 levels. It's a swordsmanship of avoiding and finding a gap to attack by instinct with strong concentration and extrasensory perception(ESP). Mastering this skill will evolve it to advanced swordsmanship that allows you to use an aura.

Haroon laughed like a crazy man checking the skill window. It was a passive skill, but he learned his personal swordsmanship, when he didn't even get a class yet. He would not be able to learn the swordsmanship only if he fought with enchanted dummies with exact movements the trainers told him.

"S-QU-I-CK!"

With a terrifying roar echoing around the square like a whistle, one side of the wall of the square opened.

"Oh!"

Finally, the boss monster appeared.

Catrat boss appeared in front of him was truly amazing. It was as big as a tiger. It started at him with burning yellow eyes. He stood up straight with its back paws and roared several times with anger of its subordinates' death.

"Are you the boss monster? Bring it on then!"

Haroon taunted it bobbing his index finger. Like its name, Polluted Catrat, it exhaled awful smell and polluted materials. Even though he taunted it, it felt dizzy enough of breathing just a few times, even with a piece of cloth covering his lower face. Thinking he did well covering his nose and mouth, he held his breath as long as possible.

But ultimately, he only knew because of the UI sound.

– Your skin and respiratory organs are polluted by strong polluting materials.
[Poisoned. You are receiving 20 damage per 10 second.]

He couldn't face him for long time. His HP is low, and it was even lower because of the fight with uncountable catrats. So before it can position properly, he threw a dagger. His target was at its open chest.

SQUICK!

With a sharp noise, the freak avoided the dagger with a swift move, and stared at Haroon. Haroon was going to attack first, but it charged at Haroon with its mouth open ready to bite him with sharp fangs, emitting strong odor.

“Thap!”

Haroon let out the breath with a shout, and thrust his sword to stab its eye. But with a metal sound, the sword bounced off its claws it raised to protect its eye. Haroon spinned his body the direction the sword bounced off to avoid its attack. Its attack made a giant scratch on the floor.

Haroon’s Adam’s apple bobbed. Whichever part of him that claws gets, it will be ripped off no matter what. But it didn’t mean his fighting spirit is dead. Haroon kicked the ground and jumped up high, slashing down the sword to its head.

The sword hit its claws again and made metal sound. Haroon’s whole body bounced back by Catrat boss’s great force. As soon as Haroon landed on the ground, the Catrat jumped on him and Haroon reacted quickly. He moved his sword to left hand, and threw a dagger with a right hand.

Squick! Squiik!

The dagger flew like a lightning and stuck deeply in its right eye. It screamed so hard that Haroon felt like his felt was like deafened. But Haroon didn’t stop there. Another dagger flew in the air. It was heading a part that it seemed weaker than the other part. It was between the two front paws that were holding its right eye. With at clear penetrating sound, Catrat’s big body started shaking. As if it couldn’t believe it was getting defeated, it lower down its paws and stared at HAroon with anger with its mouth wide opened. Haroon could see a grip of the dagger in its mouth.

“And now, begone!”

The catrat started to falter. Haroon didn’t miss that chance and swung his sword at its neck. Its vicious looking head flew away, and its headless body fall down to the ground, splashing the water.

– You have cleared Catrat’s Dungeon!

Good to hear that. But that wasn’t the end.

– You granted the title ‘Catrat Slayer’.

[You are rewarded with 5 S.P. and every stat is increased by 1 point.]

- You have acquired reward items.
- You have acquired a mystery item.
- You have acquired 5 S.P.
- ESP is increased by 1 point
- Strength is increased by 1 point.
- Stamina is increased by 1 point.
- Agility is increased by 1 point.

In addition to acquiring a proper swordsmanship, combat related skills were all increased by 1 point. It was a short combat, but it was full of an excitement and stimulation that couldn't be found in the long training. What's more is that not only he got the dungeon clearing rewards, but he also got the mystery item that has slim chance to acquire. But most of the excitement was at acquiring personal swordsmanship. Even though it was at basic level, training the swordsmanship will ultimately lead him to be a great player.

'It seems I should focus gaining ESP and Focus,' he thought.

The backbone of the sense sword is fast dynamic visual activity and swiftness. It was his thought that he will gain rapid experience in Sense Sword if he invest his bonus points on those two stats and gain more combat experience.

And now, it was time for checking the item.

Haroon took out two items that came into inventory after defeating the Catrat boss.

"So this is the item."

It was remarkable. One of them was a armor gear that was made out of Catrat boss's leather. There is no doubt that it would be very hard and durable since even the dagger at close range couldn't penetrate it.

"Item stat."

Catrat's claw

Class: Uncommon¹

Attack Damage: 200

Durability: N/A

Requirement: N/A

A throwing knife made out of Catrat boss that only lives in the extremely polluted area. It is more solid and sharper than the steel. It has properties of polluted materials that deals an enemy with 20 damage per 10 second.

“Is this a good item?”

It was good to see that it is dealing additional damage by polluted materials, not an ordinary poison. But since he never saw an ordinary item, he wasn't sure how good that item was. He was only certain that it will be rare enough since it is graded as 'Magic' item.

‘Let's keep it for now.’

Haroon took an another item.

It was ball shaped, and had a strange smell. The overall color tone was dark, and sooty that it just seemed unworthy. He hold nose and took a close look. It looked like as if it is an living creature since it had a head and legs.

“What is this?”

The face was crumpled, legs were short and it had burning red tail. What's more funny is that it had four pairs of wings.

‘I've never seen a creature like this.’ he thought.

A ball shaped creature that he has never seen in real life nor games was not moving at all as if it was dead.

“Item stats.”

Polluted Spirit (Mystery pet)

Level: 1

When the world was divided into the Divine, the Devildom, the World of Matters and the World of Spirits, for some reason this essential spirit failed to go to the spirit world. It now fell in deep sleep losing its power for unknown reason. During that time, the drainage was built, and various types of polluting materials has polluted it. Now it cannot go back to the spirit world anymore. If you take good care of it, it might be helpful later on. Though, it is quite stubborn so taming it might be hard.....

Ability: Depending on the summoner's level, it can wield every kind of elemental force. Within the owner's mana capacity, it can use common elemental spirits power until level 50, intermediate elemental spirits power until level 150, and master elemental spirits power until level 250. The more will be decided by the spirit's ego. Leveling Pet's level will gain its own skill as well.

Summoning: On the 'stand by' stage, you can communicate with pet just with your spirit without consuming any mana. Summoning it will consume 1 mana per second, performing elemental magic consumes 10 mana and 10 elemental force points per one second. But depending on the pet's capability, it might not require elemental fore points. The summoner will be poisoned upon summoning and will receive 1 damage per second.

Limitations: Except the summoner, no one will be able to see the pet until it reaches level 10. At level 10, the pet will gain its own subspace, but it will require absorbing various types of mana from items that has different properties.

Contract requirement: Pump your mana into the pet by touching its mouth with your finger, saying 'Inject Mana'

"Wait. what? This is a pet?"

It was unbelievable. No matter how weak it was, it is a scary creature that can use all four kinds of elemental force. Isn't this a cheat character?

According to a explanation, this spirit cannot go back to its world because it is

polluted. Maybe that's why it was considered as a 'pet'. Haroon was so excited to see that it is a spirit, even though summoning it will damage him. Haroon forgot that he was poisoned because of the excitement that it will get him out of the trouble he was in.

– You've got deeply poisoned.

[You are receiving 30 damage per 10 second.]

If it wasn't the UI sound, he might have been poisoned to death.

"Oh gosh!"

Haroon poured the items into the inventory, and ate a antidote pill. Haroon chock. His throat hurt, but it was better than dying. He forced the saliva to be released by pretending to chew, and it relieved a pain a little. After a while, the UI sound told him that he was cured. Only after then, he started walking out.

One the way back, he noticed that the catrat's dead bodies have disappeared. The most of the smell has disappeared as well. They will be regen'ed somewhen though.

Even though it was dirty and smelly drainage, there was a lot to earn. He couldn't wait to logout to research about the pet system. His steps naturally got faster because of his current state of mind.

"Haroon oppa? Is that you?"

Rose was waiting him walking out of the drainage splashing the water. The rain was getting heavier outside, and the darkness started drawing it, but she didn't go back yet. Her face showed a great grief worrying Haroon.

"You look so awful. Are you not hurt?"

"Yes, thanks to your worries."

"Whew, that's a relief. I was about to go to the HQ since you weren't coming back, but the smell started to be weakened. So I knew you get rid of the origin of smell and killed all those disgusting things. What was in there, by the way?"

Haroon knew the drainage cleaning was done hearing her words. The smell won't come back anytime soon until the catrats regen. Haroon thought that the origin of smell is either the catrats, or the mystery pet that was in his inventory. Haroon was

not able to answer all her questions. There was something else bothering her mind.

“It’s a long story. I will tell you later. I want some rest for now.”

Rose shut her mouth seeing Haroon’s tired face. They went back to their room getting wet by the heavy wind.



After logging out, Haroon searched Catrat’s claws. Necomwall’s item trading site wasn’t so active for now. There were just a few shoddy common gears being traded that the blacksmiths made. So he entered the auction site on the official site of Beyond. He could see the archived record of the auction of NPCs.

‘Hm... I guess not even the NPCs entered the Catrat’s Dungeon.’

He searched for Catrat boss, or Catrat’s claws, but there was no single entry about it in the Teronn Empire’s history. Maybe he was very first one who entered the Catrat’s Dungeon.

‘Well, I guess no one will want to go into that smelly place. Even if they did, they were probably the peasants who couldn’t deal with the catrats. And they might have forgot about it since the smell went away soon anyway. Also, the catrats won’t come out of the drainage, so it might be natural.’

But it was good to know that there was no weapon that has 200 Attack Damage just yet. Although it poisons the user too.

‘Let’s keep it for now. I won’t get the true value of it anyway.’

Haroon searched for the pets. Pet system existed in almost every game. There are many types too. Some are literally ‘pets’, but there were scary creatures that was controlled by the necromancers or dark magicians. Summon contract is simple too, that it was just done by injecting the owner’s mana.

But what Haroon acquired develops going through various experience, which was a great advantage, but it acted as a great disadvantage as well. In order to level it up, he needed to summon it as much as possible, but that was the problem.

‘Why did it have to be a polluted spirit? I will get poisoned for summoning it, so how can I take a good care of it?’

He couldn’t just summon it at any time, since he would be polluted whenever he summon it. It wouldn’t matter if he had large chunk of HP to spare, but he didn’t since he didn’t even get a class yet. But he needed to. He needed to use the power of the elemental spirit. Now the challenge was on showing the proper elemental magic before he is poisoned to death.

‘Let’s do it.’

Rather than actually using it, he needed to practice performing a magic show using his pet. It is really fortunate that he got what he needed. Though, he wasn’t sure if it was the power of Luck stats that he’s been investing on, or it was the power of the system that gives the user the item the one needs.



Haroon came back to Beyond, and took the polluted spirit out.

– You are poisoned.

[You are receiving 1 damage per second.]

It wasn’t a surprise to hear that he was polluted. Haroon cringed for a second, and hold it with both hands. Even though it was a ugly, ball shaped, environment-unfriendly, he needed to make it learn that he is its owner. Haroon focused on his fingers and shouted.

“Inject Mana.”

Haroon couldn’t feel any change at the beginning, but soon he could sense something in his body was being transferred to the pet. There was a change at the pet too. Its face was getting uncrumpled, and it was opening its eyes. It wasn’t even possible to see where the eyes were since its face was full black, but now he could see the white of the eye and the pupil.

“I am your master. Keep that in your mind.”

But it was just blinking its eyes. As if it couldn’t speak just yet, it just started at him

blinking its eyes. For some reason, that stare upset Haroon. He felt as if it was sarcastically saying 'Really? Are YOU, MY master?'

'Well, what am I thinking.'

But Haroon didn't have much time. His HP was almost spent. Like a baby drinking their mother's milk, the spirit greedily sucked half of his mana. Haroon put the spirit back to inventory and ate the antidote. His hands got dark because of the solution.

'This is like getting a sword that doesn't have a grip.'

Haroon couldn't see how he should be training this spirit. It was very frustrating how he only had an option to train it to get him out of the trouble, even if it pollutes him slowly to the death. He took a rest for a while, and summoned the spirit again. The spirit was fully awake now.

"Who are you? Why did you wake me up? It is so annoying, you know?" The spirit said.

Haroon was annoyed. The way it talks, the way it stares at him, it was so annoying.

"You are my pet now."

"Me? Why?"

"Because! You have consumed My, Ma, Na," Haroon said slowly, gnashing his teeth.

"Did I said I wanted it? I won't accept YOU as my master."

What is this attitude? He knew that there was only one way to deal with this kind of peo... spirits. Even though no one tell him what he needs to do, he knew very well what he should do. He blow his fist at it.

"Can"

He punched the face. Now it will know how the violation feels.

"You"

He blew twice in its belly.

"Not"

He continued hitting the belly with both hands, consecutively.

“Speak”

He disliked how it stared at him, so he punched its head.

“More”

He blew a punch at its side. It was so satisfying to see its eyeball rolling of the pain.

“Po-”

He used both hand at once.

“Lite-”

And he kicked its waist. He was feeling better seeing it fly away.

“Ly!”

For this time, he used both arms and legs. Even the knees.

The eyes disappeared in its face, so the stare went away. Well, it was because its face was swollen.

– You are deeply poisoned.

[You will die in 30 second if you don't detoxify the poison.]

Haroon quickly took an antidote. He couldn't believe that he will get poisoned by hitting it.

‘Where on Union did this kind of pet came from... ’

No good word could come out from an angry person.

“Stand upright!”

The swollen spirit stagger to stand upright.

"I am your master. Got it?"

"Alright."

Well, that's the answer he wanted. If he hit more, maybe it will get more polite, but he was satisfied enough with that for now.

'According to the info, it has lived a long life anyway. Maybe I should be the one respecting it'

He found out that violation may be more effective than what he thought. At the same time, he found out that he might use it even more because of this pet.

"My name's Haroon."

"Got it, mas... ter."

He couldn't see its eyes clearly because of the wrinkle of the face, or maybe it was the swollen part, but anyway, he couldn't really say what expression it was making. He decided to finish the first discipline whatsoever. Haroon is open minded anyway.

"What is your name tho?"

"Don't have one. Why don't you name me one, a pretty one."

But you look like a pig bladder, he thought. Haroon, however, decided to give it a name. He thought for a while, but nothing suitable came into his mind.

"How about Mirinae²? Meaning is 'the milky way'"

"Nah. Too girly."

But isn't 'pretty' very closely related to 'girly'? Haroon was perplexed.

"Rose. A name for a flower."

"I don't like it."

"Iris. It's name for a 'pretty' flower."

"That's so insincere. Isn't that a common name?"

Haroon had nothing to say. Its face was clearly asking him 'Is that all the intellect you've got?' and it annoyed him quite much. With an anger, he told it more girl names, but it rejected. And during he choose a name for the spirit, he was being poisoned more and more. It was time for him to take an antidote and put that back in the

inventory.

“‘Brat’. If you don’t like this too, you might burn with the flame.”

Haroon was at the end of his patience, and there was great force filled in his words. Everyone would clearly see that he meant it and he wasn’t joking at all.

“But... ‘Brat’...is a bit...”

Hearing that, Haroon cringed his face and hold the spirit a little bit more tightly. If anything goes wrong, he was going to throw it. If he holds it any longer, he might be poisoned to death.

“Uh... Great, Master. I lik... like it.:

It accepted the name, well, because it was threatened. It was so cathartic for Haroon. It was so glad to see it suffer. Well, so the contract was one, it was time to check his stats.

Name: Brat

Race: Essential Spirit

Type: Mystery Pet

Level: 1

Title: Polluted Spirit

Health Point: Infinite

Mana Point: 1,000

Elemental Force Point: 1,000

[Skills]

Toxic: Brat can use all kinds of basic skills about any kinds of poison, including releasing, absorbing and combining. It requires 1 mana per second.

Elemental magic: Brat can use all kinds of basic elemental skills. It requires 10 mana and 10 E.F.P. per 1 second.

Even though Haroon doesn’t know anything about Essential spirit,it was almost jealous to see it has infinite amount of H.P, 1,000 M.P. and E.F.P. More than that, being

able to use the elemental magic was what he really desired for. It was just the skill about the poison that bothered his mind.

‘Well, I guess it is good for me at least since Brat is my pet.’

What he didn’t like it was having Brat as a pet, which it acts like a brat, and poisons the summoner whenever it was summoned. But what he could do? He desperately need using its elemental power. A drowning man would catch at a straw, so Haroon needed to rely on it.

“Hey Brat, Is there anyway to make others notice your presence?”

“Isn’t that Master’s concern, not mine? Well, since you showed me what the matter world looks like, I will answer you that one. The basic elemental spirits are invisible to the others, but they can be detected by movement of mana or the evidences like change in wind, water or fire, so wouldn’t they notice my presence if there is one of them?”

It had the point, though its answer was a little bit perverse.

‘But wouldn’t that be too plain for the show?’

Haroon thought for a better move for a second, only to waste a time. He got to use a spirit, so it was only a matter of time to find a way to do it. But first, he needed to put the spirit back because he was offended by its look, and the presence of it poisoned him.

“Brat, the contract is done so you may go back.”

This perverse elemental spiritual pet Brat gone away without leaving a word as a answer. What kind of pet acts like that? Anger started to boil in deep part of his mind again.

‘Should I summon it and beat it up again?’

Haroon clearly know how he should be dealing with Brat. If he goes easy on it, it will think him like nothing. Haroon didn’t think that Brat was not accepted by the spiritual world only because he was polluted. It was probably because it acts perversely and wasn’t adorable like other pets. Haroon gnashed his teeth barely eating an antidote. He didn’t have any thought summoning it after the performance was done.

‘Were the pets have that much intelligence?’

When pets in VR games are born, they are usually too young to know anything, so the summoner has to teach everything. But Brat wasn’t.

‘Is it because it existed in the world for long time?’

It was rather to have on that can communicate with. If it acts perverse, and won’t communicate, that would be more problem in his plan. Haroon checked the stat window, also to check how much E.F.P he used.

Name: Haroon

Race: Human

Class: –

Level: 10

Title: Catrat Slayer (and 1 other title)

Health Point: 480

Mana Point: 490

Elemental Force Point : 210

Strength: 32 Stamina: 38

Intellect: 21 Wisdom: 38

Luck: 20 Agility: 60

Sustenance: 22 E.S.P.: 6

Focus: 24 S.P.: 30

Bonus stats: 2

Another stat was unlocked for him, which was Elemental Force Point. It seems that the capacity increase by 10 whenever he summon the pet.

“And I didn’t know how useful the ‘title’ was!” He exclaimed.

Because of the title he got, every stats has increased by one. It was different from how he got the title ‘Mercenary Trainee’. Finding the dungeon, and defeating the Catrat boss gained him total number of 30 Soul Point. If he has more than 50, he will be able to get a class. At this state, he will only have to slain 20 rare monsters, like Orcs.

“Wow! I’m level 10 already.”

To be not bothered by the sound during the training, he has been disabling the UI sound, and didn’t check the status window that regularly, so he didn’t even know he was already level 10. Well, nothing really changes even if he knew about it.

Levelling wasn’t his primary goal anyway, and he can’t go to his journey escaping out from the academy. Since it has almost been 3 months since the game began, so probably many others would have got class too. There was no need to feel nervous about not being the first.

‘Haha! I head great physical change instead.’

Haroon invested 3 bonus stats each to the Focus and ESP.

‘Huh? What is wrong with this?’

Well, at least it seemed he tried.

– Invalid request: Bonus stats can only be added to the basic stats.

Haroon agreed with the Beyond’s stat system. The other stats needs to be gained by one’s effort. So Haroon invested all his points on Luck, just as he did so far.

He was now back to concern what he should perform on the talent show.

‘How about throwing a knife using Brat’s ability?’

He did enjoy the swordsmanship, but throwing knives and daggers were more enjoyable, and it really suited him. Slight change of movements in hands, wrist and shoulder made which direction the weapon goes, and Haroon fell into it. Haroon was thinking adding the Elemental spirit’s power into it.

‘But the problem is the antidote. I should master trainer Hector’s lecture.’

And that was the next goal he concluded.

“Yikes, I’m late!” Said Haroon, seeing the time.

It was already the dinner time. The other students might skip a meal enjoying the scenery of the raining day. But the work-trainees couldn't. And he needed more antidote so he had to meet Rose anyway. No one knows how much more he needs to be able to use the specific elemental magic whenever he wants.

Haroon asked Rose where she'd got the antidote. Rose told him that it was Trainer Hector, the retired mercenary who is the dormitory leader and the lecturer of the Therapeutics and Herbalism. Haroon was already learning Herbalism from him, but he wasn't interested in learning medical treatment like bandaging, but things are different now.



Hector was surprised to see Haroon scarily digging in his lecture. Ironically, wanna be healers were not paying attention to his lectures.

Actually, Hector became a mercenary in a young age, so he never learned Herb from anyone, so he didn't really have deep knowledge about herbary, but It was coincidentally found antidote that made him famous. So he mainly thought about the detoxification, and Haroon absorbed Hector's teaching like a sponge, so much that Haroon started applying it. Hector never felt such an excitement teaching someone.

'Ha... What should I teach him now?'

Hector was in most happiest time in his life. He's been studying lately in order to teach his student.

"Uh, Sir."

"Why? Do you have another question? I have nothing more to teach you so study yourself, so deal with it. I even get you a book for Herbalism and Therapeutics, didn't I?"

There was only two of them left in the lecture room, so Hector try to run away before Haroon really ask something.

"Well, not really. It is about the antidote you have made."

"What about it?" Said Hector, coming back to the lecture room.

"I got one from Rose and I have used it in the drainage, and it was super effective.

There is a place near my hometown where the toxic materials are stacked up, so I have seen many people dying. If I can make the antidote, I think I can save lots of life. So... may I?"

"Why, that's very good idea. Yes, one needs to be a mercenary who value the lives. But Haven't I teach you the recipe of antidotes?"

Hector was moved by Haroon's sincere attitude in learning his lectures and his intelligence, so he even taught him his secret recipes before.

"But not all medicines can be compounded by recipes. I want to learn the way by actually compounding an antidote with you. In that way, we might prevent wasting precious medicine materials."

"Hmm. You've got the point. That's very good thought of you. In fact, compounding a medicine just by words, or texts differs so much from the actual experience. You are right on the point that making an antidote with an expert is the best way to reduce the number of tries in trials and error method."

Hector was so happy that he didn't know what to do. The others only wants to steal the recipe from him, but Harono was different.

"Alright. Come to my room tonight. Let's make a antidote together. Though the materials are a bit expensive, I have gathered most of them during my mercenary times, and others can be easily gathered so what could ever stop us?"

And that was how Haroon was preparing the performance he would make in the talent show on the graduation day.

Footnotes :

¹ Class: Uncommon

Speaking of rarity, 'Magic' was the raw term used in original text. However, Magic here is not related to any kind of sorcery. It is common term used in Korean RPG games.

일반 Common

매직 Magic (Uncommon)

레어 Rare

유니크 Unique

전설 Legendary (As the name suggests, this is the rarest item)

² **Mirine**

The Korean language has many dialects. Mirinae(미리네) is a Jeju Island dialect for ‘the milky way’(은하수)

Chapter 9

The Revenge

After getting enough of antidotes, Haroon summoned Brat whenever he could. The main training he's been doing lately is throwing knives using Brat's ability. It mainly consists of teaching Brat to adjust the trajectory direction and the speed of it. But they just kept failing. It wasn't precise enough as Haroon needed to unsummon Brat quite frequently because of the poison, and because of his weak affinity to Brat.

"Hey, are all the 'Essential Spirits' not capable of doing that simple thing?"

"Ha! The problem isn't on *Me*. The problem is on your *poor* of mana!"

Brat never admitted that whenever it lacked an ability to do something. Haroon didn't know he'd ever use violence before he saw the unpleasant glare of it.

"Oh, It's my problem now, huh? I guess you wanted a punch in your face?"

Brat ran away, well it actually flew away from Haroon.

"No way! Why is it always have to be violence? What kind of Master is like this?"

"C'mere. Quickly!"

"But, but... *but*..."

Brat could not oppose to Haroon's violent language, so it stuck itself at the flying knife that just left his hand, and adjusted the trajectory of it. And as soon as the work is done, it came back and did the same thing on the second one leaving Haroon's hand. Haroon was looking for the timing where Brat could have enough time to do its role and still looks fast enough for the audience.

"Finally. It is gettingt preciser."

Whenever he gave an inch to Brat, it always took a mile, so it took a long time of threatening and violence to make it work.

"Why would you bully me if you can just throw it on your own?"

Brat whined going back to inventory, but Haroon didn't even pretend he listened. He knew by experience that if he answers it, it won't end at any time. Haroon practiced with Brat eating antidotes countless many times in the throwing knife training ground late into the night. Now, he's got only 3 days until the graduation day. He needed to bully Brat more, as its ability increased gradually the more it uses it.

"Hey, Fake, you know you don't have much time, right?"

"Hoho, look how calm he looks, I wonder how much he is panicked inside."

"Get the surveillance ready, cuz we don't know when he'll escape the academy."

"Hey, don't be so mean. He might be dying inside, and you guys are so mean."

The Quad Wankers were mocking on Haroon in the front of canteen as usual. Not only Haroon's friends, but the other trainees were giving frowns at the Quad Wankers overactive attitude. But that didn't mean they had sympathy on Haroon. As the time goes, the trainees looked and treated him with cold looks.

If Haroon wasn't feeling guilty about it, he wouldn't say nothing at all. This was the evidence they (minor portions of building A students, and most of B and C) took. The Quad Wanker's wicked actions were too bizarre just to ignore them.

Haroon clenched his fists trembling in anger. He only had a choice to suffer in silence until now, but he didn't need to do it anymore. Haroon really wanted to get his hands on them.

"Haroon, never mind them. You've been doing it well. Just a few days more, and you know what's going to happen."

Gally cheered him up, softly tapping his shoulder.

"Yeah. You were so thoughtless swearing an oath of mana... *Tsk Tsk!*" Said a magician that Haroon didn't know the name of.

At least the magicians were on Haroon's side. They've heard from Gally that Haroon swear an oath of mana to be silent about his magic and not to use his magic during the training course. But some young magicians, including Nemion, couldn't trust Haroon anymore. Those considerably young magicians couldn't understand Haroon's attitude towards the bullies he get. They thought Haroon was being an insult to the magicians, thinking that it is coward to tolerate those mocks and humiliations as a magician.

On the top of that, some trainees secretly scanned Haroon after he took the cuffs off, and they found out Haroon's mana pool was pretty much same as an ordinary people. This became an evidence that Haroon was pretending to be a magician.

'I am not sure until when I should tolerate.'

Haroon was at the end of patience. It left a scar in his mind that his newly met friends, including Nemion, has turned their back to him.

'I guess I should focus on just focus on increasing the affinity with Brat.'

After seeing the Quad Wankers and lots of trainees pointing and laughing at him, he left the canteen and summoned Brat. It was fortunate that Brat is a spirit that the others could not see since its level was low. It could have been messy if others saw Brat's disgusting appearance.

"For what kind of f**ing reason won't you let me rest for a single seco... Ma... master, it looks like you are angry."

Brat seemed to be annoyed by being summoned, but for some reason, it stopped in the middle of sentence and stole eyes on Haroon's face. For that much, there was so much anger shown on his face, so Brat was overwhelmed by fear of being beaten up if it does something wrong.

"Yes, a bit."

"What's the matter?"

"Because of those guys over where. They've been a little bit more bitchy than you."

Counting seconds in mind, he answered him. He needs to be cautious on summoning Brat as his H.P. was way too low.

"Hmm. Yes, they do look bitchy."

Brat cringed its face and stared at the Quad Wankers. That was the first time Haroon thought it looked cute.

"Why do you leave them alone? When you beat me up as if you are going to kill me."

Brat won't understand how much effort he has been putting in the training course, and how it will be meaningless if he beat them up.

"I can't, for now. I will take a good revenge if I am freed out of here."

Even if he said so, it won't be easy. He wasn't sure if he would be able to meet them when the course is done.

"Huhu, then how about feeding my poison to those thoughtless bundles, master?"

"No way! How should I be revenging them if you kill them?"

"Huhuhu, Well, among the materials I've absorbed in the drainage, there were some polluting materials that no medicine nor magical treatment can cure. Also, some materials have medical usage as well, but when one takes it too much, it could be poisonous, but it cannot be cured. After all, those are not poison. So let's feed those airheads, master. Let them suffer the perishing pain of diarrhea to regret the actions they took."

It was very tempting. Haroon was at limit of tolerating their overaction, and Brat's offer was very evil, and tempting.

"But would that be ok? I mean, what about the other trainees? They will get poisoned if you get near them."

"Huhu, Count on me, sir. I can seal the poisonous aura for a moment with my mana, and that will be safe enough for those baby smelling youngsters."

"Sounds great than, Alright. You've got my permission."

As if Brat knew Haroon didn't have much time to keep it summoned, it hurried its way. As a spirit that can wield all four elements, it flew without leaving any trace and sprinkled something on the Quad Wanker's foods, and came back. Haroon was near to death, but he had one more thing to ask.

"You still can cure them, right?"

"Huhuhu, of course, I can. You still don't know my true form, right? Then how could you say you are my master? Dang, you've got a long way to go."

"Just get lost!"

Brat went back to Inventory cringing its face. Seeing how forearms are darkened, he was in emergency. Haroon took an antidote.

‘And I should get the recipe to make this antidote before the course is finished.’

There were so many things to do, but so little time. When everybody else was preparing their performance on the talent show, Haroon had to do various training, labor, getting poisoned to train the brat for hundreds of times.

“Haroon, sorry if we kept you waiting.”

“Oh, Hey!”

Other three work trainees were coming to Haroon.



“Nnnnggggh! Oh, my stomach!”

“I... I’m dying.”

“Somebody, help!”

“Sniff, sob”

It was that night the disharmony of quartet’s scream woke every trainee of Building B and C. Starting from Phillip, the Quad Wankers fold up, roll on the ground and went in and out of the toilet, only to get their stomach even more hurt, and not to cease the diarrhea. It felt as if their intestines were being twisted, or even being disconnected. They couldn’t stand up even when they had to go to the toilet. They let everything out, but stomach just kept screaming pain.

At first, the trainees felt pity for them, but soon they were annoyed by non-stop screaming. The dormitory leader even called up the Healer of the academy, but it was no use. The screams couldn’t be volumed down.

A magician was called up too. That showed how big the Quad Wanker’s background is, but that was no use too. The magician was very angry at being summoned at late night, but he had to go back with awkward face as he couldn’t do anything about the stomachache.

Their scream continued until the dawn, so no trainees in building B and C could ever sleep. Their complain burst out in the morning.

“Those crazy bastards. How could they scream all night long for stomachache? So pathetic. And they want to be mercenaries? *Tsk tsk!*”

“I know right? They’ve been skipping their training to chase 123 just to mock him up. They’ve probably earned the gods’ wrath.”

“Yeah, they must be punished by the gods. To be honest, it is Haroon who is gentle. If it was me, I’d probably have beat them up already.”

Some trainees told the others during the lunchtime about what they heard from the magician trainees.

“One of my friend told me about 123. It seems like he promised not to use nor speak about his magic until the end of course. He even swore an oath of mana or something.”

“Really? Well, I heard some magicians swearing an oath on their mana.”

“I guess that is right. Isn’t 123 a work trainee? Maybe swearing an oath of mana was the precondition to get the recommendation. After all, no one knows how recommended him, right?”

“Something is definitely behind this situation. I’d rather believe in 123’s silence who trains hard, then those childish wankers.”

Social psychology is quite interesting. The trainees have been thinking Haroon very suspicious because of his amazing improvement as a magician. But now they’ve turned their arrows at the Quad Wankers. Their scream was calmed down on the sunrise, but that was only because they screamed themselves hoarse.

Using their background, they even summoned a priest. A rumor said that the priest got angry because his power of holiness didn’t work on them. The reason was that they’ve never done any good acts that their body cannot accept the holiness.

Hearing that, Haroon summoned Brat on standby.

– “What have you done?”

– “Huhu, it will be more strange if holiness works. What I fed them wasn’t the poison. It was just one of the polluting materials I absorbed in the world of matter for ages. Originally, it has a medical property that makes digesting system active. They ate just too much that a human body cannot handle. How can holiness dull the effect of a medicine?”

– “and you said you can cure it?”

– “If you summon me, I can just absorb them. I see you are planning something fun. Don’t forget my grace then.”

Brat paused there and leave a sigh and continued.

- “How did an amazing spirit like me met such an incompetent Master?”
- “You can’t be changed even if you are beaten up until a submarine docks into a mews house, can you?”
- “No, NO! I’m sorry, Masty!”

Haroon cancelled the summon, not letting the violence come out from his fists.

‘Once I get a class, I will get an item that gives me resistance to the poison first.’

Haroon was about to give a compliment for what Brat did, but Brat was already proud of his work and raising the mood, and Haroon didn’t like the look of it.

‘I might get my personality bad because of him.’

Haroon was patience, and didn’t like the use of violence. But Joining Beyond and meeting Brat has messed his personality up.

‘Anyway, I’ll let those suffer just one more day. Then they may will overcome their bad habit.’

He will have to cure them eventually. Even if a priest couldn’t cure them, they won’t live long. But Haroon wasn’t that angry at them. Haroon went for a meal in a sweet mood that he didn’t feel in a long time.



“Oh gosh, please, help me.”

“No, help me first... *Woah!*”

The Quand wankers keep going in and out of the toilet even in the nurse’s office. They ate nothing for 24 hours, but stomachache didn’t seem to dull down. Even they let everything out in their belly, urgent need of the toilet was still there.

“God, damn it! What on earth did they eat? Why is wrong with these guys when other trainees are fine?” Schultz shouted with anger, because they disturbed his sleep as well.

“No idea, sir,” said Hector, coldly looking on the Quad Wankers. “I was about to kick

them out anyway since they were busy enough to gossip trainee 123, so much that they had to skip their training.”

“Oh, is that so? So these are *the* ones they talk about? This turns out to be great. The priests couldn’t cure them anyway, so let them die like this.” Schultz’s angry eyes started burning.

Haroon was a very special trainee to the trainers. Even as a work trainee, Haroon was showing splendid achievement and attitude in every lecture he took. To the Trainers, Haroon was a sincere, talented trainee.

To a teacher, the most impressive student is the one who has an ear to listen to what they teach, a sincere mind to do what one learned, and a passion/talent to overcome the course. Haroon was the only student that participated every lecture, and the one that has most honors from the trainers.

But the Quad Wankers were gossiping on him, instead of trying hard to catch him up. Even if Schultz tried to, he couldn’t think of them in any good way. The Quad Wankers’ faces went pale hearing Trainer Schultz’s cold words.

“Please, Sir!”

“Help us out, please!”

“I’ll do anything if you can help me with the pain.”

“It feels like the organs are coming out whenever I go to the toilet. Please, cure us.”

Their eyes were sunken just in one day. Even big muscled Gitan got very thin, and their face got darkened.

“We’ve contacted your parents, so they will give you some news. Seeing how all the others are fine but you, it only can be your fault of eating something wrong, or you may have touched something poisonous. We mercenary academy and the trainers are not responsible on this affair.”

“Didn’t you know you will be blessed only when you bless the others?”

Schultz and Hector left the office giving another cold look on them.

The Quad Wankers didn’t even have a strength to scream, only to lie down on the bad. The only possible way to be cured is their parents hiring high circle magicians or high priests.

“What a state we are in. My father is probably counting on me to graduate the course as a top trainee,” said Philip, with his eyes sunken.

“My parents are counting on me too. What on earth have we eat?” Ritrina could not understand why only they are that sick.

“I, I can’t even speak. I rather die than living like this for just few more days. I don’t even have any more underwear...”

“But you are better than me since you are a man. How did a beautiful lady like me got this dirty illness? *Sob, sob!* I might be embarrassed to death.”

Serinn’s face turned yellow, hearing Gitan’s grumble.

The Quad Wankers were consoled by seeing each other’s sickness, but that didn’t relieve the pain of the stomachache.

No other trainees came for them. It was the followers who spread the word that it might be infectious. No one, including the trainers, wanted to share the burden of them.



Knock! Knock! Somebody was at the door.

“Who... is it?”

Philip answered with almost dying voice. At least Philip was the healthiest as he spent longest time in training among those.

“Hey, The Quad Wankers. It’s been long time.”

Surprisingly, it was Haroon.

“Why... Why are you here?”

“To see us suffer, probably.”

Philip answered Ritrina cringing his face.

“You know, it didn’t feel like it was the end of the day since I haven’t been hearing your mocking for a long time. So, how are you? Is there anything left in your belly?”

Haroon’s sarcastic word has changed their expression to anger. Haroon has turned the tables. Seeing Haroon smiling and saying sarcastic words has enraged the Quad Wankers, because Haroon always has been facing them with poker face and silence. The toy they’ve been playing, was playing on th.em.

“Shut, Shut up! You goblin! Get Lost, GET LOST!”

Ritrina couldn’t tolerate the embarrassment, and cursed him. But Haroon’s face didn’t change at all. Seeing each member of the Quad Wankers turning red because of the anger, Haroon shook his head.

“And I thought I might be able to cure your sickness with the medicine I had... But now I don’t see why I did even think about that idea,” said Haroon, reaching his hand at the door knob.

“Wa, Wait! What did you just say? Did you say you can cure us?”

They jumped up holding their stomach, and approached him.

“The symptom I see is very similar to the illness I know of. If I’m right about this, I’ve got the right medicine.”

That changed the Quad Wanker’s face once again.

“What is it? Say it!”

“Wha, what have you got!”

They were desperate. They solidly hold Haroon’s clothes. It was hard to believe that they were sick just a moment ago. But Haroon acted carefree unlike them.

“Why should I give a medicine to you? To whom they think me as a great enemy. And I don’t know if this can cure you, and if it doesn’t, I’m pretty sure you will be blaming me, won’t you?”

“That, Thats...”

“I won’t be mocking on you anymore. So please?”

“I beg you! I might die like this.”

“I apologize for the acts I’ve done. Please!”

Is that the act of someone who begs for help? Haroon smiled, which almost seemed as a smirk.

“You? Mocking me? You really thought you could mock on me? Who do you think you are? Ha ha ha, That’s so funny. I never thought you were mocking on me. Why would I care on your meaningless words if I can reveal myself as a magician on the graduation day, when the oath of mana doesn’t have any effect anymore? Did I look like I was being mocked by you guys? I don’t even care.”

The Quad Wankers’ face went pale.

The confident attitude he had made them doubt their suspicion on Haroon. They realized how naive they have been thinking their acts were pressuring Haroon.

“A, anyway it was our bad. I’m sorry. What can I do for you?” Said Philip.

Just as Haroon thought, Philip was the smartest person among them. The others were not recovered from the shock.

‘Did he really swear the oath of mana? Is that why his mana was so low when the magicians scanned him? Was his mana was sealed as well?’

The giant crack was being made on what they trusted.

“I don’t have much of it since it requires too many precious materials, and it takes long time to be compounded. To cure you guys, I think I have to use all the ones I got. Moreover, eating it once wouldn’t cure the illness wholly. In the worst scenario possible, it would take years. So I think I need to get somewhat fair price. How do you think?”

Their face was brightened up.

“If you are certain that it can cure us, I can pay no matter what it cost.”

‘It will definitely cost your arms and legs,’ Haroon thought.

“I’m not sure if you know this, but I don’t know the value of the money since I’ve been living in the deep mountain with my grandfather who was a magician, herb gatherer

and healer. So call the price. I wonder how much the medicine will cost, that can rescue you from the pain of death.”

Philip couldn’t answer so soon. He wasn’t able to do it. It was way too much painful to value it with the money.

“I’ll say 3 gold,” it was Ritrina, moaning like a dog looking for toilet.

“I see. I see you worth 3 gold. So cheap. I guess you can endure the pain.”

Haroon’s cold words calling her ‘cheap’ enraged her.

“How about 10?”

Maybe that would be all right. All the money Haroon had was 9 silver 40 bronze. Compared to that, 10 gold was high enough. Haroon wasn’t sure how valuable that was, but if he exchanged with the real money, that was about \$1000. It did good enough, but Haroon played hard to get.

“10 gold... Maybe you can endure that much pain too.”

Haroon’s word made them very serious. It was written on their face that ‘are you lying to see us suffer?’

“I will tell you that one of the material is ironsnake’s gall bladder.”

That surprised them. They knew very well how effective ironsnake’s gall bladder is at detoxifying the poison, and how rare that is. It was so rare that you couldn’t buy it with its money.

‘Huhuh! You wankers,’ Haroon was lying about the material, but it wasn’t entirely a lie. ‘That’s a material for the antidote that I use for summoning Brat. For Hector who gifted this antidote, you wankers will have to pay for his grace instead for me. Got it?’ he thought.

Hector gifted Haroon every antidote he made with Haroon. On that night, the best antidote was created because Hector used every kinds of material he gathered on his time serving as a mercenary. But Haroon saw the face of Hector which had bittersweet emotion of using all things he collected. So Haroon knew very well how valuable the antidote was to him, so to pay back Hector’s grace, Haroon was planning to extort

some money from them, and revenge them at the same time.

“Then I can trust you. How should I pay you?”

“Tell me the price you think it will be.”

Haroon made them choose. 100 gold was already very much, but Haroon didn't have a reason to set the price as he doesn't know the value of money here.

“Th, Then how about 5... 50 gold?”

Philip carefully asked.

Haroon tried hard to hide the smile and nodded. 50 gold is \$5000 in real life. Thinking all he will use during this revenge is the antidote that will be needed to summon Brat, that was just free money. But he knew that it was very risky to raise the price more. He thought it was good to stop at that point.

“Deal, that'll do.”

Haroon took a small pocket from his cloth. It was made out of deer leather, which originally contained the antidote that Hector gave him. Philip took a ball shaped, sooty pill. It was almost thumb sized, and had really bad smell.

“Let's make this easy, Phillip. Where is the money?”

“Here. I brought this just in case. It will be little more than 50 gold, but I will give you all.”

Phillip took out the pocket that was quite big. As if he thought it was better to take the pill than spend more time on counting the money.

“Wa, wait! What about us?”

“Are you crazy? I only traded with Philip.”

It was good to see other 3 cringe their face. 50 gold was quite fortune for them too. Moreover, they were in the middle of training, so there was no way they had that much money. And 50 gold only could buy one pill. That wasn't so pleasant to them. Making the pocket inside out, Haroon showed them he only got other 3 pill left.

“Even I cannot get this medicine anymore, and you want it for free? You guys are so

mad.”

When things were still in chaos, Philip took the pill without water. He was that much urgent. Even at the moment the pill was going over the throat, he felt like his organs were being tangled. Haroon too, took an antidote and secretly spawned Brat in standby mode.

– “Brat, you know what you should do, right?”

– “Huhuhu, sure, I do. I knew you were so violent, but I didn’t know you were that evil, seeing how you made them eat a pill made out of dog manure and your own pee.”

– “You started it. Cut the nonsense and absorb what you put in them when I spawn you.”

– “Alright. Huhuhu, this is fun!”

– “Oh! And don’t absorb it all, and leave some left. Just enough to make them feel a little bit of pain and feel like they would get diarrhea.

– “You are making a lot of request. But alright.”

Trying not to make the Quad Wankers hear him, he moved his lips to spawn Brat. As soon as the pill slurp over the neck, Brat started sucking the polluted materials. Then the Philip’s expression changed quite strangely. Madly boiling organs were stabled, and the stomachache was gone. Only by not feeling the pain and the need of toilet, Philip felt like he was being redeemed.

“How is it? The pill is certainly effective, right?”

“Yes, it seems it’s really effective. It doesn’t hurt anymore.”

Haroon turned back and quickly took an antidote. Phillip’s eyes were full of thankfulness. The hatred, jealousy was gone in a second. He was thankful enough to get his pain away.

“That’s really rare medicine. It can detoxify any kinds of poison.”

“Thank you, thank you so much.”

Philip thanked him several times holding Haroon’s hand.

“Well, the others seems to be okay, so I should get going”

Haroon turned back again and reached his hand on the door knob.

“You can’t!”

“Just a minute!”

“Please!”

The other three rushed at him at the same time and stopped Haroon. Two girls were holding his arms with both hand too, and press their body firmly on him. The soft body of girl gently being pressed on him shook his mind, but Haroon shook his head to clear his mind.

“I, I don’t have enough money. Is there anything else I can do?”

“Same for me. Can I pay you by something else?”

It seemed the other three doesn’t have much money. But they were desperate.

“Well, you can pay by giving me some item. I can do you that much favor, if the item is good enough.”

They showed him what they got. Seeing their expression, Haroon carefully chose the best things they got with some money, and handed ‘the cure’ to them. Seeing them making strange faces tasting something strange, Haroon felt so sweet of his victory.

‘But this shouldn’t be the end,’ he thought.

“But If I am right, you are not fully cured. That’s the illness caused by wrong mindset. You need to take the pill at least once in a 10 days for at least a year. You need to train your mind too.”

“Wha, What do you mean?”

The Quad Wankers was feeling the peace of absent of pain, but their face went pale again hearing his words.

“The lord of a manor who my grandfather was curing has ignored this and died by his anus ruptured. He needed to constantly consume the pill and train his mind, but his nature was so f**ked up that he couldn’t believe my grandfather’s word and kept exploiting his people and died miserably. Not that he only can eat, but even drinking the water made it burst inside his body and his body spouts it up and down, so how can he live? Lately, I happen to see his dead body, and guess what I saw. His stomach was high up like a mountain, but his anus was ruptured, swollen like his lips.

“Nnnngh!”, Ritrina groaned hearing his words, and fainted.

Maybe that was too harsh for someone like her who had quite impatient personality.

“Then Wha, Wha, What... should we do?”

Philip was shuddering with the fear. It was simply unimaginable. The other three's hands that was holding Haroon was shaking hard too, and almost torn his clothes.

“Well, that must be your concern. The world is wide, so I'm pretty sure there is another person know this medicine too, wouldn't there be? With your parents power, that won't be so hard to find. I know your parents got some position.”

Their grasp got weaker. They are probably believing their parent's capability. So Haroon shook them off, and headed to his room.



“Huhuhu, that was fun.”

He earned enough money for the materials he used making the antidote, and he made good fortune too. He got some items additionally, so Haroon came back to his room with sweet victory in his mind.

Haroon checked the items he's got. Serinn gave him a two-piece unisex underwear. Normally, she emphasizes her beauty, so this was kind of item she would have. She also commented that somebody gifted her before he joined the training, but she was saving it because she was afraid it might get torn because of the training.

“Item info.”

Enchanted Underwear

Class: rare

Armor: 35

Durability: 145/150

Requirement: N/A

An underwear made out of soft fabric, the specialty of Tatrishl. The magic enchanted

to it automatically fits the size of the wearer. Comfortable to move, and won't get stained. It was additionally enchanted to prevent wearer from the suffer of sudden change of temperature.

Option: Agility +2

"That's perfect. I got to wear this right now."

Haroon didn't hesitate to change the clothes. It was quite big, but it slowly fit to his size. Even though he didn't know how valuable that was, getting 2 additional stats on agility were pretty big to him.

"And, this looks like a belt. Let's see"

Multipurpose Belt

Class: Uncommon

Amor: 150

Durability: 220/240

Requirement: N/A

A holder for the sword is connected at the waist part, and two long strips of throwing knife holder that connected to the shoulder part. Up to 100 knives or swords can be holded. It is made with Black Bear's leather and tender, and it can be used as a whip if no knives are held. It's very tough and solid that an ordinary sword won't able to damage the belt.

Option: Stamina +3

It was a fine item too. Even though it had only one option, it was very useful for him since it could hold the throwing knives. Haroon decided to own it for his good.

"This red sword looks good too."

Systu's flame sword.

Class: Uncommon+

Attack damage: 100~120

Durability: 80/100

Requirement: Sword related class only.

This is one of the Systu, the flame meister's first work. It burns everything it cuts by the flame element it has. The monsters tends to fear it by instinct. It is easily breakable as less materials were used.

Option: Strength + 3, 30% additional fire resistance

"This is insane!"

An item with this much option and attack damage would easily valued over 50 gold on the auction. Haroon put two items in the inventory. He earned about 60 gold that day, but he decided to give 50 gold to Hector to pay for the materials. That wouldn't be enough for all the materials, but that was how he was going to present his thankfulness.

'Huhuhu, and this won't be the end.'

The Quad Wankers won't be able to escape from Haroon at least for an year. The magician, the priest, nor Hector could find the reason or the cure of their sickness, so the only person they could rely on was Haroon.

'But they won't be spreading my words, would they?'

He was afraid of this to get to Hector's ear. He wasn't kind of a person who would receive anything from the patience for healing them, so he wouldn't like how Haroon made them pay for the pill. After all, He was too good person to be a mercenary.

Also, the Quad Wankers had strong sense of pride, so they wouldn't bother to say to the others that they got help from Haroon.

"All I have left to do is practicing the performance."

For some reason, he knew he was going to have a good sleep tonight.



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